Doris Lessing: Reading and Culture

Partisan Review 1

1998

$6.00
$7.80 CAN

WILLIAM PHILLIPS Remembering Isaiah Berlin

ROBERT WISTRICH Understanding Hannah Arendt

GEOFFREY HARTMAN Shoah and Intellectual Witness

MILLICENT BELL Fiction Chronicle

LEONARD KRIEGEL Courage, Memory, and Belonging

EDITH KURZWEIL Film à la mode

HEIDI URBAHN DE JAUREGUI Thomas Mann's Diaries

AT THE GALLERIES:
Karen Wilkin

FICTION:
Janko Polić Kamov

REVIEWS:
Jeffrey Herf
Gitta Honegger
Paul Kane
Edith Kurzweil
David Pryce-Jones

POETRY: **Adam Zagajewski, Melanie Rehak, Karl Kirchwey, Barbara Jordan, Alberto de Lacerda (tr. Christopher Middleton), Heather McHugh, Charles Tomlinson, Stephen Sandy, Donald Revell, Emily Taylor, Elizabeth Spires, Charles Baudelaire (tr. Norman Shapiro)**

Nease Library
Eastern Nazarene College
DOES NOT CIRCULATE

0 73361 64907 2

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sixty Years of Great Fiction from Partisan Review

"Have there been ten quarterlies in the literary history of the West that have meant as much to the readers of their time as Partisan Review? *I would guess not."* —Norman Mailer

THIS ANTHOLOGY showcases the work of many of the great writers of this century and shows the significant role *Partisan Review* has played in the development of our literary culture.

Individual and examination copies available from Partisan Review Press, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. Tel. 617/353-4260.

Walter Abish	James T. Farrell	Alberto Moravia	Susan Sontag
James Baldwin	William Faulkner	Amos Oz	Jean Stafford
Samuel Beckett	Franz Kafka	Cynthia Ozick	Gertrude Stein
Saul Bellow	Doris Lessing	Katherine Anne Porter	William Styron
Italo Calvino	Bernard Malamud	Isaac Rosenfeld	Tatyana Tolstaya
Albert Camus	André Malraux	Philip Roth	Michel Tournier
Eleanor Clark	Norman Manea	Delmore Schwartz	Lionel Trilling
John Dos Passos	Mary McCarthy	Ignazio Silone	Robert Penn Warren
Ralph Ellison	Daphne Merkin	Isaac Bashevis Singer	

Paper: $14.95 0-9644377-4-0. Cloth: $24.95 0-9644377-5-9
Distributed by Independent Publishers Group. 1-800-888-4741

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For Hannah Arendt, her biography of Rahel Varnhagen was not just a study of a historical Jewish figure, but an exploration of her own German-Jewish identity. Never before published as Arendt intended, *Rahel Varnhagen* now returns to print in the first complete and critical edition of the book in any language.

RAHEL VARNHAGEN

The Life of a Jewess
First Complete Edition
Hannah Arendt
edited by Liliane Weissberg
translated by Richard and Clara Winston

"So intense was Arendt's identification with Rahel that Rahel's letters became Arendt's way of experiencing herself as a woman within Jewry, a Jew within Germany, a voice uplifted against anti-semitism, an unconventional woman within the male world of philosophy. Weissberg's introduction, a tour de force of post-structural analysis and psychological insight, maps the complexities of an identification so intense that it compressed time and transcended space."
—Carroll Smith-Rosenberg,
University of Michigan

"This is a thoroughly up-to-date edition of Hannah Arendt's *Rahel Varnhagen*: well-translated, carefully annotated, introduced in terms of current concerns with identity, the forms of biography and autobiography, the history of German Jewry."
—Elisabeth Young-Bruehl,
Haverford College

$29.95 hardcover

The Johns Hopkins University Press
Hampden Station,
Baltimore, MD 21211
1-800-537-5487
www.press.jhu.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Partisan Review

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
William Phillips

EDITOR
Edith Kurzweil

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Steven Marcus

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Stanislaw Baranczak
Morris Dickstein
Don Share
Rosanna Warren

CORRESPONDING EDITORS
Leslie Epstein
Eugene Goodheart
Roger Shattuck

CONSULTANTS
John Ashbery
Frank Kermode
Barbara Rose

PUBLICATIONS AND ADVISORY BOARD
Joanna S. Rose, Chairman
Lillian Braude
Edwin Cohen
Cynthia G. Colin
Judith Ramsey Ehrlich
Stephen Feinberg
Richard Grimm
Marjorie Iseman
Harry Kahn
Mary Kaplan
Vera List
Robert H. Montgomery, Jr.
David B. Pearce, M.D.
Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.
Joan C. Schwartz
Dorothea Straus
Jon Westling
Edwin M. Zimmerman

Partisan Review, published quarterly in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall by Partisan Review, Inc., is at Boston University, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. Phone: 617/353-4260. Fax: 617/353-7444. Subscriptions $22.00 a year, $40.00 for two years, $56.00 for three years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $28.00 a year, $56.00 for two years; institutions, $32.00 a year. For subscription inquiries, telephone 617/353-4106. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money order or checks drawn on U.S. account. Prepaid single issue $6.00. Add $1.50 for postage and handling. US ISSN 0031-2525. Copyright © 1998 by Partisan Review, Inc. Second class postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts and additional entries. Postmaster: Send address changes to 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. Distributed in the U.S.A. by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, OH 44870. Phone: 800/221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Send manuscripts (originals or clear photocopies only) to 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. No manuscripts will be returned nor queries answered unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

CONTRIBUTORS 5

COMMENT

William Phillips 9

ARTICLES

Doris Lessing *An Evening Discussion* 11

Robert Wistrich *Understanding Hannah Arendt* 30

Geoffrey Hartman *Shoah and Intellectual Witness* 37

Millicent Bell *Fiction Chronicle* 49

Leonard Kriegel *Fathers, Sons, Brothers, Strangers: A Meditation on Courage, Memory, and Belonging* 61

Edith Kurzweil *Film à la mode* 88

Heidi Urbahn de Jauregui *The Art of Getting By* 93

Karen Wilkin *At the Galleries* 124

FICTION

Janko Polić Kamov *Freedom* 107

POETRY

Adam Zagajewski, Melanie Rehak, Karl Kirchwey, Barbara Jordan, Alberto de Lacerda (tr. by the author and Christopher Middleton), Heather McHugh, Charles Tomlinson, Stephen Sandy, Donald Revell, Emily Taylor, Elizabeth Spires, Charles Baudelaire (tr. by Norman Shapiro) 73

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

Edith Kurzweil	*Nazi Germany and the Jews. Volume 1. The Years of Persecution* by Saul Friedlander *Shtetl. The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* by Eva Hoffman	**139**
Gitta Honegger	*Hitler's Wien* by Brigitte Hamman	**149**
Jeffrey Herf	*Germany Unified and Europe Transformed* by Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice	**157**
David Pryce-Jones	*Whittaker Chambers* by Sam Tanenhaus	**162**
Paul Kane	*Dark Songs: Slave House and Synagogue* by Laurence Lieberman *The Fuehrer Bunker: The Complete Cycle* by W.D. Snodgrass *Work Without Hope* by John Burt	**168**
Statement of Ownership		**175**

Editor's Note: "The Greenhouse," "Letter from a Reader," and "Long Afternoons" from *Mysticism for Beginners* © 1998 by Adam Zagajewski. To be published in January 1998 by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTRIBUTORS

DORIS LESSING's *Walking in the Shade* is published by HarperCollins . . . . **ROBERT WISTRICH** teaches at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is the author of *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma* (F. Cass). . . .Columbia University Press published *The Fateful Question of Culture*, by **GEOFFREY HARTMAN**, Sterling Professor of English and Comparative Literature (Emeritus) at Yale University. . . .Professor Emeritus of English at Boston University, **MILLICENT BELL** is the author of numerous books. . . .**LEONARD KRIEGEL**'s *Flying Solo* is just out from Beacon Press. . . .*Mysticism for Beginners,* **ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI**'s latest collection, translated by **CLARE CAVANAUGH,** is forthcoming from Farrar, Straus & Giroux. . . .**MELANIE REHAK** lives in Brooklyn. . . .**KARL KIRCHWEY**'s latest book is *The Ungrafted Word.* He directs The Unterberg Poetry Center in New York. . . .**BARBARA JORDAN** teaches at the University of Rochester. Her book, *Trace Elements,* is due from Penguin this spring. . . .**ALBERTO DE LACERDA**, Professor Emeritus at Boston University, has published numerous books of poetry. . . .**CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON** is a distinguished poet and translator. . . .**HEATHER McHUGH,** Milliman Distinguished Writer in Residence at the University of Washington, is the author of *Hinge & Sign*, among other books. . . .New Directions published **CHARLES TOMLINSON'**s *Selected Poems: 1955-1997.* He is Emeritus Professor, University of Bristol. . . .**STEPHEN SANDY**'s *The Thread, New and Selected Poems* is forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press. . . .Professor of English at the University of Utah, **DONALD REVELL** is the author of *Beautiful Shirt* (Wesleyan University Press). . . .**EMILY TAYLOR** is a former Starbuck Fellow at Boston University. . . .**ELIZABETH SPIRES**'s most recent book is *Worlding.* She teaches at Goucher College. . . .**NORMAN SHAPIRO** teaches at Wesleyan University. His translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press. . . .**EDITH KURZWEIL** is the editor of *A Partisan Century* (Columbia University Press). . . .**HEIDI URBAHN DE JAUREGUI** is Professor of German Literature at the University of Saint Etienne. . . .**IAN JOHNSON** is studying law at Cornell University. . . .**JANKO POLIĆ KAMOV** died in 1910, leaving a body of work that changed the course of Croatian letters. . . .**LJILJANA ŠĆURIĆ** has translated many of his stories. . . .**KAREN WILKIN**'s *Cézanne* is available from Abbeville Press. . . .**GITTA HONEGGER** teaches at The Catholic University of America. Her book on Thomas Bernhard is forthcoming from Yale University Press. . . .**JEFFREY HERF** is the author of *Divided Memory* (Harvard University Press). . . .**DAVID PRYCE-JONES**'s book *The Strange Death of the Soviet Union*, was published by Henry Holt . . . .**PAUL KANE** teaches at Vassar College. He edited the anthology, *Poetry of the American Renaissance* (Braziller).

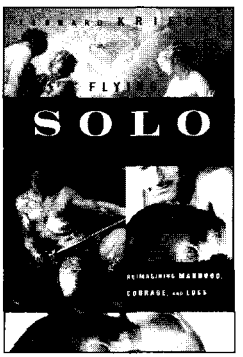
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LEONARD KRIEGEL

FLYING SOLO

REIMAGINING MANHOOD, COURAGE, AND LOSS

Childhood polio left Leonard Kriegel without the use of his legs. *Flying Solo* is a portrait of masculinity seen through a lens that makes everything look different: recognizable—but reininvented, intensified, and utterly hard-won.



0-8070-7230-0
hardcover $22.00

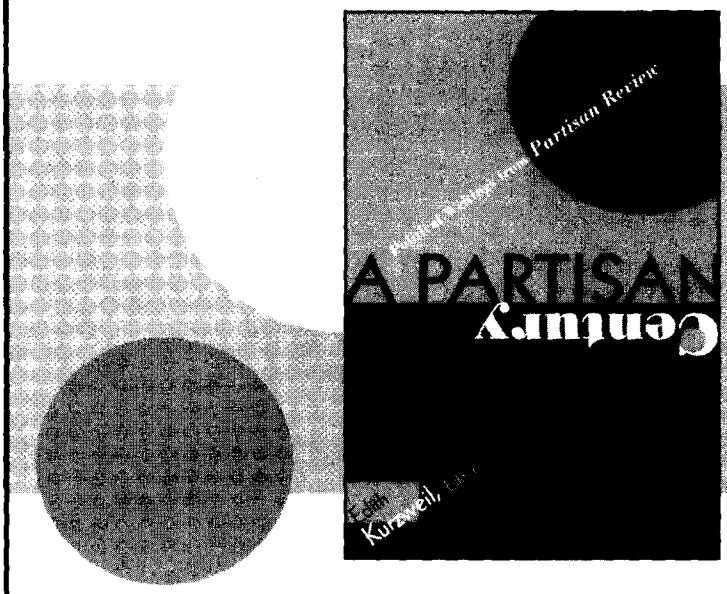
"A powerful meditation upon what it means to be a man in America. A book that will make every reader, male or female, more human."
—**Pete Hamill**, author of *Drinking Life: A Memoir*

"**I love *Flying Solo***: its intelligence, its anger and passion, its wisdom. Kriegel's body is crippled, yet his mind sees far beyond his body and renders life in beautiful sentences that make this work a memoir, a book of stories and myths, a fierce embracing of life."
—**Andre Dubus**, author of *Dancing After Hours*

AVAILABLE JANUARY 1998

BEACON PRESS, BOSTON
http://www.beacon.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



A Partisan Century

Political Writings from Partisan Review

Edith Kurzweil, Editor

"This collection is full of plums—pieces that have become classics of political and social writing. To have them all together is wonderfully useful. I kept turning the pages and thinking: 'So there you are, nice to see you again.' I do recommend this book."

—Doris Lessing

"In its sixty-three-year history *Partisan Review* has provided a bridge between politics and culture which has ensured the decency of the former and authenticity of the latter. . . . For those who want to live history, and not just read about it second hand, I could hardly recommend a more compelling volume."

—Irving Louis Horowitz

416 pages / $19.50, paper

Columbia University Press
At bookstores.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These are some of the people... Lionel Abel, Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, John Ashbery, W. H. Auden, James Baldwin, Donald Barthelme, Roland Barthes, Samuel Beckett, Daniel Bell, Saul Bellow, Peter Berger, Isaiah Berlin, Joseph Brodsky, Peter Brooks, Robert Brustein, Albert Camus, Cyril Connolly, Morris Dickstein, T. S. Eliot, Herbert Ferber, Michel Foucault, Helen Frankenthaler, William Gass, Allen Ginsberg, Nathan Glazer, Eugene Goodheart, Clement Greenberg, Peter Handke, Elizabeth Hardwick, John Hollander, Sidney Hook, Richard Howard, Irving Howe, Franz Kafka, Frank Kermode, Arthur Koestler, Leszek Kolakowski, Irving Kristol, Milan Kundera, Edith Kurzweil, Doris Lessing, Mario Vargas Llosa, Robert Lowell, Dwight Macdonald, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, André Malraux, Steven Marcus, Mary McCarthy, Daphne Merkin, James Merrill, Leonard Michaels, Hans Morgenthau, Robert Motherwell, Vladimir Nabokov, Joyce Carol Oates, George Orwell, Amos Oz, Cynthia Ozick, Octavio Paz, William Phillips, Marge Piercy, Norman Podhoretz, Barbara Rose, Harold Rosenberg, Philip Roth, Jean-Paul Sartre, Meyer Schapiro, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Roger Shattuck, Ignazio Silone, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Andrei Siniavski, Susan Sontag, Stephen Spender, William Stafford, William Styron, Lester Thurow, Michel Tournier, Diana Trilling, Lionel Trilling, Robert Penn Warren, Leon Wieseltier, Edmund Wilson

who have written for

Partisan Review

Why don't you become one of our readers?

PARTISAN REVIEW
236 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215

Enter my subscription:

- ☐ One year at $22.00 (4 issues)
- ☐ Two years at $40.00
- ☐ Three years at $56.00
- ☐ Institutional rate ($32.00 per year)

Foreign subscriptions add $6 per year.

Name

Address

City State Zip Code

☐ My check is enclosed

Please bill my credit card: ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA

card number exp. date

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COMMENTS

Andrew Delbanco's book, *Required Reading: Why Our American Classics Matter Now* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) has many interesting pieces. He is a good literary critic, and he has a lively sense of the past. But in his preface to his latest book, he advocates a compromise between the methods of traditional criticism and those prominent in the academy today and generally known as "political correctness." This strikes me as both foolhardy and evasive. You can no more combine the criticism of, say, Eliot, or Trilling, or the New Critics, with the jargonized and deconstructionist mumbo-jumbo, than you can combine good and evil, or totalitarianism and democracy, or atheism with religion. To make the compromise seem plausible, Delbanco defines the new academic theory as a political approach to literature, to go along with a textual approach. But the politically correct movement is not simply political; it contains a variety of trendy ideas. One wonders why someone as accomplished as Delbanco should make such a suggestion. Could it be that peace, even in intellectual matters, is more desirable than controversy?

John Ellis' *Literature Lost* (Yale University Press) is a splendid book. His analysis of the trendy movements and ideas that make up the Left today is far-reaching and illuminating. I would question only his emphasis on figures like Tacitus and Rousseau among the sources of the ideas that constitute the academic Left. No doubt there have been dissenting voices in the past, but they have been, however occasionally mistaken, authentic, as compared with the ersatz Left today. It is difficult to understand why the Left, especially the academic Left, should adopt such views, that are both extremist and fashionable today. Unless, after the demise of Soviet Communism, something had to be put in its place. It is as though the inauthentic Left abhors a political vacuum.

After all, if we go back to the origins of political radicalism, to Karl Marx himself, it is obvious that Marx did not promote gay liberation, or radical feminism, or sexism of any kind, or deconstruction, or affirmative action, or cultural diversity. Nor did he find virtues in the Third World and in backward countries generally. And Marx was opposed to the kind of populism that finds its home on our Left. It will be recalled that he talked of "the idiocy of the village." I believe the Left has an honorable place in contemporary politics, but not the trendy concoctions that pass for it.

Isaiah Berlin was an outstanding figure. Even if one disagreed with Berlin on some matters, he was a brilliant historian of ideas and an original exponent of traditional liberalism. He was an anti-communist, a believer in political pluralism, an antagonist of utopian ideas. His reminiscences of literary life, especially among dissenters in Soviet Russia, were memorable.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Berlin was the English equivalent of Meyer Shapiro. Both were enormously learned. But Berlin was less saintly and more worldly. He had great charm and charisma, and was a dazzling conversationalist.

In my experience Berlin was outdone only once in a philosophical argument. It was at a luncheon with a few friends in his rooms at Oxford that he got into a debate with Iris Murdoch about Existentialism. Neither of them was a slouch in intellectual matters. But Murdoch out-duelled Berlin in this instance. On another occasion he exhibited his great wit and modesty. When Mary McCarthy complained to him that he was mistaken and unfair in saying that Hannah Arendt was over-rated, she got nowhere. She finally said to Isaiah that Hannah Arendt thought he was also over-rated. Isaiah Berlin answered her, characteristically, that both he and Hannah Arendt were right.

WP

The brouhaha over the two recent "sex conferences" at the New Paltz campus of the State University of New York, once again, is being depicted, and fought over, in terms of free speech versus repression, and of differentiating between public and private funding. But these formulations miss the point by failing to address the central question, which is that students enter universitites in order to receive an education. Given the (documented) lack of students' knowledge of such subjects as American and European history, English, mathematics, geography, etc., shouldn't we assume that they might forego learning about S&M art? Newspapers reported that the students "saw nothing wrong with it." However, it seems to me that rather than appeal to their opinion, it ought to be the responsibility of their professors to educate rather than entertain them, and to help prepare them for competing in the global market place. For they are far behind their European counterparts—who are taught to separate education and learning from smut and pornography, and whose professors attempt to prepare their charges for the so-called New Age. In this context, it is even more irresponsible that the President of the University "charged critics for bowing to political correctness." This proves not only that he wants to hang on to his job, but that he doesn't even know that this term—derived from the Communist party—cannot be applied to any established authority, and especially to the "right."

Unfortunately, it is this sort of ideological nonsense that also prompts critics of the universities to search for alternate ways of education which, in turn, widens the gap between the educators and their potential students. Even Orwell didn't know how right he was when he said that a certain kind of nonsense can be learned only in universities.

EK

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Evening with Doris Lessing

Edith Kurzweil: I would like to introduce Doris Lessing, who has been kind enough to come in and talk to us. I don't think she needs much of an introduction. Everybody knows her and everything she's done. Just to remind you, some of her most famous novels are *The Grass is Singing*, the *Children of Violence* series—*Martha Quest*, *The Four-Gated City*, as well as the recent book, *Love, Again*. Of course, *The Golden Notebook* is what everybody keeps remembering. Her new book, *Walking in the Shade,* part of her autobiography, is in the stores. Doris Lessing will speak for about a half hour and then she will be happy to answer questions.

Doris Lessing: I'm in New York to promote my book *Walking in the Shade*, which is in the bookshops. It is the second volume. That's all I'm going to say about that. I've done my duty.

I want to talk about something else, which I've no doubt is of great concern to all of you, it's what we call "dumbing down." I hear about nothing else here and in England, so while I don't think anything I'm going to say is going to be startlingly novel, perhaps just putting it together might be a help. What is happening in Britain reveals the various symptoms of this rather terrible situation. For example, you find that highly-educated people and literary people say, "Oh well, I'm not going to read that. It's too long. *The Mutual Friend* is too difficult and anyway I don't understand all the words." This is a kind of style or stance which is regarded as quite amusing. These are not lazy or stupid people, but they are behaving lazily and stupidly and apparently don't know it. There's no shame attached to it. One of our bright young men announced (I've forgotten which literary paper it was in) that if he had been around when Virginia Woolf jumped, he would have been very happy to make sure she drowned and wouldn't come up. Again: this is a very "smart" remark, admired. Another little symptom is that the classics are being abbreviated, are being published in shortened and easy forms, and no one thinks this is terrible or shameful or in any way remarkable. I'm just describing things that I'm sure will not surprise you. Another thing is what's going on with publishers. If publishers are here, I've got a feeling they will agree with whatever I say because the publishing houses are packed full of people who love literature and whose hearts are being broken all the time by what happens, by the reign of the accountants.

There is a phenomenon which I call the Educated Barbarian. This is someone who could have been in school or university for many years, could have won prizes by the score, and at the end has read nothing, knows

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no history, and above all is totally incurious. Quite a large number of my young friends are like this. They're all utterly delightful. We have a wonderful time together. We gossip, we go shopping. We chat about our friends, but at the slightest mention of anything literary their eyes glaze over. Looking back at my misspent youth, I can remember people who were not particularly literary. They were not even very educated, but they would take it for granted that they should have read *War and Peace*. They did not say, "Oh this is so difficult. Oh this is too long and I don't understand the long words." They just read it. That's what people were like then.

So as not to bore you by quoting hundreds more examples of this, I'm going to talk about the reasons for this phenomenon. One is so familiar to us that we take it for granted: that is that every child in Western culture, particularly in Britain and this country, has been brought up with a half-minute attention span. I've been watching television in my hotel bedroom and it's broken up more than it was before. You can't bear it. Your brain starts complaining. Now all the kids have been brought up like this. They take it for granted, moving from one channel to another. They all do, everywhere. Something happened when I came in by plane, and I'm sure it has happened to everyone else. British Airways thought that we would not be able to endure fifteen minutes of silence during the time it would take to park at the gate so they started playing Mozart. It wasn't proper Mozart. It was *sound bites* from Mozart. The beautiful little bits. Each time music came back on and then they said "Please don't loosen your seatbelts," and then they said, "Have a good day," and then they said, "Thank you for flying with British Airways," and there was the music, which in itself was broken up. By the time all that had been done I felt perfectly sick. Because it hurts. We have all got used to this. We don't complain. I don't know why we don't. The question is, what is it doing to our minds? Now, short attention spans and continual switching from one level to another—is it possible that it is contributing physically to the triviality that we complain of? The other night I heard a young man with a small child say that the programs made for very small children are deliberately broken up. He was concerned because these programs are no longer continuous narratives. They are all in little bits. The child's brain is being conditioned to operate like that.

Now here I'm going to raise an enormous question, just to throw it away. It is my belief that we value narrative because the pattern is in our brain. Our brains are patterned for story telling, for the consecutive. I'm sure of it. I mean, there is nowhere else this pattern could be but in our brains: it doesn't come from outer space. The pattern is being broken up all the time, which means the substance of our brains is being attacked by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the kind of books that we're now used to, all in little bits, or the kind of programs that we're now used to, or some of the films that we now see, which are so fast that sometimes I find it hard to keep up. None of the young people do. The other night I saw a very gray, very slow, very beautiful film. A young person in the room was saying "cut, cut, cut, cut, cut." He couldn't stand it. He's used to "flick, flick, flick, flick, flick." I'm used to the long, slow narrative and a look on someone's face that tells you about a life and the slow way two people cross a room so you can see what they are like from how they move, and so on. There are two completely different sensibilities here.

Now this inconsequentiality, which we are educating our children to, teaches them they have nothing to do with what's going on. If there's a narrative, you are a part of it. If it is little bits of plot all broken up, then the person does not connect with it, and I wonder if this leads to remarks like that of a young man who murdered someone and said, "Oh well, I didn't realize it would hurt him." This was in London, a young man tortured a half-grown child and said afterwards, "I didn't realize it would hurt him." Well, he's been watching films all his life where torture goes on and he's not connected with it. He's not in the story.

Quite a big question involves music. Once upon a time, music, civilized music, was listened to by a few educated people. What is happening now, as we know, is that everybody is assaulted by music from every direction and young people might spend years of their lives with very loud, thumping music going straight into their brains. Now music is in fact extremely potent, very emotional, and has always been used by governments and authority to affect people. It has been used by churches very efficiently. It is used by governments when they send young men off to war hoping that they will be so tanked up on music that they won't mind being killed. Shamans use it all the time either for healing or for ecstatic purposes. People know that music is very powerful, but apparently we never acknowlege that. Has anyone who is responsible, teachers or educators, thought that this music could in fact damage a young person? It is my belief that a whole generation of young people, and soon it will be more than one, are emotionally disturbed because of music, which goes straight into the emotional centers. There was a very interesting bit of research done in reply to that cliché we used to hear so often, "Well, he's a very refined person because he loves Beethoven." They subjected a whole lot of people to very high levels of a spiritual kind of music and after that put questions to them. They were much more bloodthirsty than they were before they heard the music. What they had been listening to had affected them in such a way that they were ready for sensational punishments, I mean, punishments that affected them with pleasure because they were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brutal. This is a vast subject. I understand that serious research is being done on it, I'm glad to say, because I think it is extremely damaging to our young people.

I'm just going to mention political correctness in passing because there's nobody here, I'm sure, who hasn't been involved in the debates about it. I don't want to talk about the actual "party line," as it were, but what it derives from. Political correctness, to my mind, stems straight from the old Communist Party. The mere words "correct," "incorrect," the "correct approach," the "incorrect approach," and so on. It is Party language, and it is bullying. But what has happened is that yet again we have enormous numbers of people all over the world sharing a readiness to accept a particular dogma, as if they have no critical faculties. I'm well aware that I'm skating over some dangerous ground, but this is how I see it. I think it's probably the most astonishing phenomenon of our time, that from one end of the world to the other you will hear people murmuring, "It's politically correct" or "It's not politically correct." Who ordered them to do this? And why? Why does everyone fall on their backs and wave their little paws in the air? Why do we do it? Why don't we say to these bullies, "Go back and torment your friends with this nonsense and leave us in peace"? The whole world is now mouthing these little clichés. I do not understand it. I think it is utterly astounding that this should have happened. We lost one dogma, the Communist dogma, the Party line in literature—which went far beyond the Party and the Left and affected all kinds of people far removed from the left wing—but we so love our chains that we instantly drag on a new set. This is how I see it.

Another thing that lowers standards generally is the way that literature is taught, which is part of political correctness. It is itemized. It is pulled apart. It is dissected. I do not think any author who has ever written has imagined his or her work being dissected in this way. They see it as a whole.

Very often journalists come to me and the first question goes like this. They say, "Mrs. Lessing, do you think a writer ought to...?" Now this nearly always has to do with taking a public stand on something and I say to them, "Do you know where that question comes from? Do you know what your antecedents are? No?" The antecedents are the Communist Party and left-wing rhetorical language. Writers should be out on the barricades. I mean, I don't have to belabor this to this audience. I say, "I think every writer is different and every writer should have their private conscience and it's not a question of writers having to do anything. Why are you talking like this?" But this is so far removed from the way they have been taught that they literally don't understand what I mean. Because of course they believe writers ought to be on soapboxes of some kind or toeing some party line, political correctness among them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now I'm going to talk about a kind of revolution that we are living through. It's the electronic revolution. We're in the middle of an absolute, total change, but it is not the first one we have gone through. We went through the print revolution, which we now take for granted. For a long time there were books in monasteries, read by a few monks or privileged people with libraries, but not everyone had books. Then came printing presses. When you read about that time what is astounding is how quickly Europe was flooded with books, from one end to the other. Suddenly, within a few years, everybody had their own books and everybody was reading. It is worthwhile remembering that when people first started to read, they read aloud. It did not occur to them that they could read silently. The monasteries were very noisy places. Everybody was reading aloud at the top of their voices. Then it occurred to them that they didn't have to read aloud. They could mouth what they were reading and suddenly it all fell silent. The next thing that occurred to them was that they didn't have to do that either. It could all go on in their heads. According to a book I just read, this process took two and a half to three centuries. We don't know what happened to our brains when that happened. What did happen to the human brain when print assaulted it? Have we ever asked this? We probably have and I haven't read what these investigators have said. There is one thing that we do know happened. We lost our memories. Before that, people without address books or encyclopaedias kept it all in their heads. They had the addresses of all their friends, reams of poetry, information of all kinds, they had it all here. I have met people from Africa, illiterate, who keep everything in their heads: pages and pages of addresses and telephone numbers, the names of books and the names of people. We couldn't keep that much in our heads. We have lost a faculty and we don't even know we have lost it. We are the people of the print revolution. We have lost a very valuable capacity. We are, these people think, very defective people. Well, we are defective compared to them. Now, what are we losing that we don't know we're losing is my question. At that time I very much doubt whether everybody was sitting around saying, "Well, now we're going to lose our memories." It probably never occurred to them. But roll on the centuries and we've forgotten what happened. What is happening to us at this very moment, I wonder, that we don't know about?

Nease Library
Eastern Nazarene College
DOES NOT CIRCULATE

I want to remind us all nostalgically about how things used to be. Goethe, at the very end of his life, said, "I have only just learned how to read." He was a very old man and one of the great intellects of Europe, a great poet, so it is unlikely that he meant he had only learned how to use the ABC or put sentences together. He said he'd only just learned to read and what did he mean? Here, in his diary, is a description of what I think

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he meant and what I think reading should be, and it's not how we teach it. He says—and I have to say the prose is a bit cluttered, but I don't think that can be Goethe's fault: "Hence it is everyone's duty to inquire into what is internal and peculiar in a book which particularly interests us, and at the same time above all things, to weigh in what relation it stands to our own inner nature and how far by that vitality our own is excited and made fruitful. On the other hand, everything that is external, that is ineffective with respect to ourselves, or subject to a doubt, is to be consigned over to criticism, which, even if it should be able to dislocate and dismember the whole, would never succeed in depriving us of the only ground to which we hold fast, nor even perplexing us for a moment with respect to our once formed confidence." I need to repeat that phrase, "What is internal and peculiar in a book which interests us and at the same time above all things to weigh in what relation it stands to our own inner nature and how far by that vitality our own is excited and made fruitful." Now that seems to me what reading should be and what should be taught to children. What Goethe meant was that you should not bring your own agendas to a book. You should not be looking for your political messages, your own ideas. On the contrary, you should be rather passive. You should allow no barrier between yourself and what the author is saying. It should be a kind of transparency. Now this in fact is rather hard to achieve because our minds are always full of some agenda or other, and it's very hard not to put that into the book. "Well he should be doing that, he shouldn't be doing that, she oughtn't to be doing that. . ." There is a book called *A History of Reading*, by Alberto Manguel, which is brilliant. It ought to be in the hands of young people, because it will tell them just how valuable reading has been, how it has been valued in a way that they do not because they haven't been taught to. It is my personal view that our minds have been damaged. I'm being serious. I think we might have damaged minds. That is why we are getting stupider and stupider. It's not ill will or television only. My own attention span is much shorter, and this is not old age, either.

I want to briefly touch on something else that is very much related. I have been describing the situation in developed countries, in our kind of society, but there is a very big world out there, the Third World, which does not have our "advantages." I was in a school in North London talking to some very privileged young men. They had people like myself every week, and I stood there looking at these faces and I knew they were thinking, "O God," (because they had to, this was compulsory) "we've got to sit through this," so I started to describe to them what I had seen two days before. I had been in a very desolate place in Northeast Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia, at a school which consisted of some barracks stuck in the sand. They had practically no books, textbooks, not even an atlas. It goes with-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out saying that they didn't have electric lights or telephones. All the kids were saying, "Please give me your books. Please can I have your books. Please send books from London." This is a place where they frisk the children coming out of class in case they've stolen books because their desire is so great. They found a tome on advanced physics under a little boy's bed and said to him, "Why did you steal this book? You can't understand it," and he said, "I want a book of my own." I could in fact wring your hearts with many tales like this, but I will just quote another little example. This happened to a friend of mine who continually travels the country trying to provide books. Two young men came to her, aged sixteen and seventeen, and said, "We hear you have some books. We have built ourselves a library. Come and see it." They had built a little grass hut and a wooden plank, creosoted for the white ants, and that was the library. They said, "There is our library. Can we have some books?" So she did what she could. I know people who work all over the Third World. The place I happen to know is Zimbabwe, but this happens everywhere. A friend of mine went out into a remote village and threw away the paper she'd wrapped her shoes in and everyone dived for the newspaper. It was weeks old. It was a treasure. It was precious. Now my son who went out to work with this team for a little bit took a taxi from the airport to the city and told the driver what he was doing and the man said, "Well, the government has taught us how to read but they don't give us any books." Theirs is a government that pays lip service to providing libraries and books but in fact does not do it and that is true all over southern Africa. It is an astonishing fact that people who have hardly held a book in their hands yearn for them, because they certainly haven't had any decent libraries or they've been very lucky if they have. They beg for books. Why? I mean, it is a strange fact that there you have this reverence for books and for literature, but in our kind of society we worry day and night about the fact that kids don't want to read. It could also be that you don't value what you get easily. The book team that I am involved with takes out packages of books. Do not imagine that they're the kind of books we would be deeply moved by because they're just what the local publishers produce. This letter comes from a place called Gokwe where they were taken two boxes of books which sit on a shelf under a tree. That is the local library. It has transformed this area. There must have been about forty books. The letter reads: "People from different areas they flock to drink and swallow at our library. I can compare our library as a source of life. A human being cannot live without water, reading books. Books is their rainwater." Now I think that there are people in this room whose grandparents might have had this attitude towards reading books. I think that my grandfather or his grandfather did, and it is gone from our society. The paradox is this: that the brains of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people in a place like Zimbabwe, who have probably never seen a fax or a word processor or a computer or any of the stuff that we take for granted, might be in better shape than our kids' because they have not been assaulted all the time. They are of course going to catch up with us, but probably not as efficiently because they have governments which steal everything that comes their way. It might in fact save them. This is a fairly cynical remark, but it's a funny thing that I can have a conversation with a young teacher in the bush who is trying to teach without proper textbooks, without an atlas, without anything, who loves books as the people in this room do, who yearns for them, and who sees books as a source of life, but I couldn't have this conversation with my highly-educated young friends in Britain, who are not interested. They are not interested in ideas. They're not interested in anything in books. I'm merely describing something. I have no solution for it. As I said before, I think probably many of you are familiar with a lot of what I have said. These are the sad thoughts that are running through my head at the moment.

Fred Siegel: You talked about how important reading was in the early modern period, and it strikes me that it was because it was so intimately connected with Protestantism. It's the ability to read the Bible, the necessity of reading the Bible, and the interiority that's associated with Protestantism that gives reading its power, its sacredness. That glow has long since worn off as our society became essentially de-Protestantized. McCluhan wrote about the media revolution in the sixties, as a screed against the Reformation. He was hoping that that interiority would be lost by these new media, and he wouldn't be surprised by anything you were saying. In a sense he anticipated and welcomed it. He was a counter-Reformationist, though people mistook him for a modernist. His hope was that, as reading was lost, ignorance would return, and with ignorance wonder, and with wonder the singularity of the medieval church and its glories. Protestantism was essential to this original power of reading. What you're talking about we've really seen coming for thirty years and McCluhan in a sense is its most-maligned prophet.

Doris Lessing: The thing is I'd like to know what you think about this because I find it shocking, you see.

Fred Siegel: I find your description entirely accurate. I think people do have shorter and shorter attention spans. I think what you describe is true, but it's interesting that McCluhan predicted it. He saw what effect television would have, that television replacing books meant that people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wouldn't have this kind of interior experience. The first printed books looked like illuminated manuscripts. It took a long time for people to make sense of books. There's this very intense personal relationship that takes place when you read a serious book. You think about it, mull it over. Most postmodern art or drama or movies are all about surfaces, quick cuts. You never know much about the motivation of the characters. We're assigning *Moll Flanders* this year in what used to be called "Western Civ." We're not allowed to call it that anymore. It's called "The Making of the Modern World." The students are having a terrible time with *Moll Flanders*, whereas when we assigned *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, it was contemporary, it was a soap opera. *Werther* was one obsessive thought, they recognized that as modern, but all of Moll's peregrinations, all of the shifts in her life, her trying to get right with God, all of the individualism and interiority that are at the center of *Moll Flanders* are absolutely alien. I wanted to take over this class in part because I wanted to reshape it as a Western Civ class and call it that again and give the kids a sense of the excitement of reading these books, but I have no idea if I'll succeed.

Doris Lessing: But you know when some young African teacher in the bush—and God knows how many there are—dreams of owning books, it's got nothing to do with the Protestant Revolution. For some extraordinary reason, they still see books as a source of knowledge and, of course, power.

Fred Siegel: But there's a prestige associated with books—and isn't it derivative in some sense? It's derivative of the sense of the West that's the source of knowledge and power, and the reason the West is the source of knowledge and power goes back to the Protestant Reformation. It's what made the West different. It broke the unity of the medieval world and the stasis of Catholicism. I may be wrong. I have never spent a minute in Zimbabwe.

Doris Lessing: It could be any Third World country. You see I don't care if it goes back to myself. I don't care if it goes back to Luther or something like that. The fact is the passion for learning is surely a valuable thing. No?

Fred Ciporen: I'm publisher of *Publisher's Weekly*. I hear your concern and the angst, but there is another side to it—there are more books published today in the United States than ever before. There are more book outlets and more books purchased than ever before, and recent consumer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surveys of buying habits have shown that young people are buying more books. The pace is different. Young people have a visual sense and a perception that is somewhat different. It sounds as though you're concerned, but also that you believe that they're dumber. I just think it's different.

David Sidorsky: I wanted to agree entirely with your empirical analysis and then raise a question about an area where I think you may be overly pessimistic and another where you are, I think, overly optimistic. A number of years ago, Oscar Handlin, the librarian of Harvard, said it simply is beyond him to understand why students who learned to read in bad high schools came to Harvard and were able to handle the curriculum and become excellent scholars and why sophisticated students from the better high schools, who come knowing all the quips of television and the current films, aren't able to do nearly as well. He assumed it was television, the sensate culture, that was responsible for what he saw as a decline in the humanities.

On the music point, when Bloom wrote *The Closing of the American Mind*, he said he got hundreds of letters from parents and was later invited to the White House and Nancy Reagan told him how much she had liked his book. I said, "Do you really think she liked Nietzschean Marxism?" and he said, "No," and I said, "Well then did she read the book?" and he said, "Yes," because she talked about what the parents' letters were, all complaining how they felt rock and roll was disturbing the ability of their children to read. This was the the message of his book, going back to Platonism and control of music.

The importance of image politics and the inability of those who are politically correct to take the heat is very human. So I think the empirical analysis is completely correct. My point is, is it cultural or does it have to do with the brain? I hope you're too pessimistic, because I have been looking forward to a period of great cultural decline where the intellectual standards survive, not in art, music, and humanities but in the sciences and to some extent in the professions, in medicine, in law, in business. Yet if you are right about a different physical brain ability, it would have a deleterious effect outside the humanities. What I think you may be optimistic about is how overwhelmingly other cultures have become inundated with American television, and I just wonder if that isn't going to be the future. The inundation by music and the television culture and the movie culture of our time seems unstoppable.

Doris Lessing: Yes, you're probably right, but in the meantime there isn't enough money around for them to have all this. You know rock and roll now seems to me to be quite charming compared with this bang, bang,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bang, bang which kids now listen to. It's almost as if the tune doesn't matter. What they need is a pounding.

David Sidorsky: They want the beat.

Doris Lessing: I know, but I simply can't believe this doesn't affect people.

David Sidorsky: Doris, why is reading such a great virtue?

Doris Lessing: Yes, I was waiting for that . . .

David Sidorsky: It's not a virtue, it's a companionship. It certainly doesn't make you virtuous, but. . .

Doris Lessing: No, but when you meet somebody, when I meet somebody, okay, the same kind of person as myself, we have a kind of hinterland of shared values, frames of reference. The conversation sort of picks around from, well you know, you quote something, you mention something from books.

David Sidorsky: So when we're talking about reading, what we really mean is reading what is worthwhile.

Doris Lessing: Yes, I do.

Fred Ciporen: And the audience for what is worthwhile, things of literary merit, in the United States is about 12,000 or 15,000 people. It has remained constant. I had a great cultural historian as a professor, Warren Sussman, and he studied television. He thought "Mary Hartman" was one of the most profound things. He thought that *It Happened One Night* was one of the best things that was done on the Depression. You yourself said that reading creates a loss of memory, so I don't know that reading in itself is that much of a virtue.

Leonard Kriegel: I remember some time in the early seventies, being on a panel with Warren Sussman—we were arguing about popular culture and literature and taking opposite sides. I wonder whether there isn't something else that's also operating today. I think that people still read. I think young people also read, but what I think has happened to the culture is that the sense of differentiation seems to be disappearing. Let me use as an example my younger son, who is a reader. I remember once walking into the room where he was sitting and reading *Ulysses*, which would make

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any father who's a writer, as we say in Yiddish, *kvell*. But right next to *Ulysses* was a comic book called *Conan the Barbarian* and he was reading both. In college he took a course on *Ulysses* and he loved it, but I'm not quite certain that he, or anyone in his generation, distinguishes on some level between *Ulysses* and *Conan the Barbarian*. I mean, they distinguish in the sense that they know that *Ulysses* is "great literature" and *Conan the Barbarian* is a comic book but there are no levels. It seems to me that what we had when we were younger was the idea that there were levels of culture. I was totally ignorant in music; I don't think I ever had a course. I didn't go to school between my eleventh and thirteenth years, but I went from listening to Gershwin to listening to Beethoven and Bach. I knew that there were levels and that you went from A level to B level to C level. I think that has really disappeared and that all sensation, all ideas are equal. I think that also accounts in part for what we see as a kind of breakdown of the idea that sensation has consequences, that if you stick a knife in someone, it's not blood that Stephen Spielberg is filming, but it's real blood and it's a real body on a real floor and there's a real death. I think that has gotten lost somewhere along the line.

Joanna Rose: I want to take issue with those who say reading doesn't make you virtuous. I think reading does make you virtuous and I think virtuous people tend to read. My husband and I are deeply involved with central Harlem, with children who have no future except if they learn to read. This is what we try to tell them all the time, when you can read you have freedom, you have an open future. I really think it does make you virtuous.

Doris Lessing: As do I.

Igor Webb: I have three children under the age of six. My experience is more complicated than the one you present. I have seen many of the things you have noted, but I am very startled by children's television, not in the sense that it zips by too quickly, but that what you see on Nickelodeon, in my view, is actually terrific. Most of the shows are inventive, witty, very subtly moral. In fact, I'm astonished that they're on. I don't know who makes them, but I'm struck by the shows for kids up to about age seven. Once you get beyond that you suddenly get a very strange shift and something different goes on. Before that point I'm struck by how deeply literary these visually inventive shows are. Some of them are also fairly offensive, so it's not a single picture, but I think it's far more complicated than the way you have presented it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Doris Lessing: Well, good.

Dorothea Straus: It seems to me that children in Africa who have not had our privileges read everything with equal excitement. Today we have a glut, we have too much of everything, and I think that has done something to the brain. I don't know if it's physiological but I think there's been a deterioration from glut. Everything comes at you in great quantities. Television has not affected the number of books published, but I think it probably has affected our joy in books.

Morris Dickstein: I think it's ironic that on a flight across the Atlantic you felt bombarded by things that were coming at you too rapidly. If you were still able to take the Queen Mary across the Atlantic, no doubt you'd have curled up with Gibbon's *The Rise and Fall.* The fact is that the whole world has speeded up—information, communication, travel, and so on, and there's no reason in the world why the media and literature, which to some degree reflect the pace of life in the world, should not also have speeded up. My point is that of course, for those of us who grew up in a more print-oriented period, it's very hard to adjust. No one has ever said that the twentieth century was an age of narrative, and arguments and complaints about discontinuity were registered about *Ulysses.* They were registered about all the modernist experiments from futurism to expressionism. They are part of the literary core as well as the electronic core of the twentieth century. Now we may say that today it's often being done in a very banal fashion, but nevertheless this kind of discontinuous mood, a more jazz-like, collage-like mode, is central to the twentieth century. Of course it has created a great nostalgia for the older kind of narrative.I've heard that in England, two-thirds of the country got deeply involved in the miniseries based on *Pride and Prejudice.* That's not literature but it's a nostalgia for the older, more luxuriant kind of narrative, which is still available in various ways, but it represents something that we associate with the nineteenth century and it does not really reflect the rhythm of life as we experience it in the twentieth century.

Doris Lessing: I knew I was going to get into trouble if I mentioned narrative at all.

William Phillips: I'm surprised that several people, in one way or another, have sort of gotten away from the central fact that is implicit to what Doris Lessing has been saying, that there has been a cultural decline. The fact that technology produces this naturally or the fact that thousands of books which are worthless have been printed every year doesn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

get us away from that fundamental fact. We also know that young people don't read the serious books. And when you talk about the number of books being published, you know what a serious book sells. You know what publishers expect of books. Many serious books don't sell because they're not read, and what I've been hearing is an attempt to get around this central fact by citing evidence of some other kind.

Dorothea Straus: Do you think that the ratio of serious books read formerly and now is the same, or lower? I think it's about the same, really.

William Phillips: It's probably about the same or maybe a little lower. I think, if you want to extend this, that serious books were read by serious people, and now they're still read by serious people, but there may be fewer serious people.

David Sidorsky: It's harder than that even. The culture in decline is many things. If you look at American scholarship, it's torn between politicization of the work and very narrow technical readings or exegesis. There is very little criticism which is the criticism of the kind that was referred to in the past. I think that's true of the American academy. It's true of the Western European academy. I think the decline in standards is real. When Dario Fo wins the Nobel Prize in literature, that says something. The evidence is, I think, strong that there is some sort of culture of decline. What exactly are the symptoms and what exactly are the causes? It's very complex and debatable. I feel like William. Arguing the facts seems to me very, very difficult.

Speaker: Isn't that the cry of every generation?

David Sidorsky: Yes, and sometimes it's right.

Renata Adler: I think the questions are where you raise them. It's not something that happens every generation or so or every few years. The question is not whether people my age read comic books when they were young or whether there's some pop culture thing going on or not. This is very deep, it goes to almost all institutions of culture. It has a lot to do with political correctness. It's not just about reading and political correctness separately and a little decline in standards. Children in schools are studying the structure of the pop song. It's not even that schools pander to the children. The children are too young to pander to. They are teaching this rubbish day and night. I think it's kind of a miracle if something good is happening in the Third World, because it strikes me all the time that these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

values in one sense are underclass values. Everything is quick cuts and no consequences. It's sort of a knife in the night. It doesn't matter whom you hurt. It relates intimately to that screen. I think it's that close. I think it's not just the television set going flick, flick, flick. It has to do with values in the street, the values in our lives, the values in our prose. What they teach instead of history is political correctness so there's no continuity; it's not even continuity of narrative. There's no historical continuity. There's only sort of snippets of text in history books and they say, "This culture in ancient Egypt, we owe a great deal to it. Well, what do we owe to it? We owe certain forms of modern decoration and the wooden pillow."

William Phillips: I want to applaud Renata.

Cynthia Green Colin: Can I make a counterpoint? I remember my education, which was supposedly a weak education, and I got to study China, five times, I was on the silkworm committee. It was a lot better than studying the structure of the song. That's not my major point. My major point is that it is my understanding—and again this is not reading—that dance performances are ten times more numerous than they were in the thirties and forties, that there are thousands of symphony orchestras across this country which were not there before, so I don't think one needs to be so deeply depressed. I think also people are reading things that may not be the standard literary narrative. I wonder if Fred could tell me how many copies were sold of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb,* for example, which requires some sustained effort by readers.

Fred Ciporen: I don't know the number of that but I support you in what you're saying. Also there are more magazines published, there is more information out, there are more people reading. . .

Fred Siegel: We have a fantastically wealthy economy. The growth in spending on theatres and the number of dance companies is a pittance in this multi-trillion dollar economy. The test of this is not how many books are bought. The test is what people draw from the books. Almost all of my students are double 700 on the SAT. They cannot construct a coherent argument. If I ask them where Korea is, they have no idea. A lot of things are going on at once. Yes, a lot of books are being sold. And yes, there are a lot of dance performances, but the average scores for the intelligent student at the leading schools, the quality of work they're doing, or how much they bring to the table is declining and declining dramatically.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cynthia Green Colin: What they bring to the table may have declined from the literary standpoint according to how we've thought about literature. I'm not clear that they don't have an infinitely greater understanding of biology, geology, things that we weren't expected to know.

Edith Kurzweil: I think that what Fred is saying also is that, to begin with, if people cannot read, they cannot absorb the biology or the history or anything else. And their knowledge of history is abominable.

Harry Kahn: It seems to me that we're not taking into account the way the world has changed, the opportunities of other ways of getting information. Radio and television play a great part, and there are many reasons why people read less. Is there something about reading that makes it better than television or better than radio? It certainly is the best. But, I think that kids growing up today want to read and there's no reason why they can't, but they have the misfortune of having so many other choices.

Edith Kurzweil: I think you're right, Harry, up to a point. But what I find disturbing is that the people who are producing the shows on television, who talk on the radio, themselves have not read enough to inform those who listen as well as they could.

Fred Ciporen: On public television a couple of months ago there was an excellent series on Stalin and what he did to Russia. That was as good as anything written on Stalin. So it's not just television per se that's a lesser medium.

Annabel Grimm: I'm not American. I'm from Mexico City, but I agree with you, sir, completely. I taught Mexican dance. I have been a dancer and choreographer at Columbia University for four years, and I have to bring a map of Mexico because the graduate students have no idea where Mexico is. I found this absolutely horrendous. So now my dance company and I go around to schools. We begin with a big map, "Where is Mexico?" And the kids say, "Oh I know, Mexico's in Africa. Let's see. Where's Mexico?" I'm profoundly shocked, and I think that Americans should begin to know where Mexico is.

Laurie Dickstein: I'm a little surprised by this discussion because what we're basically saying is that your children, or perhaps your grandchildren, are stupider and less educated than you are, and I don't believe that you believe that. And when you say that rock music really hurts your head and you have nostalgia for early rock and roll. . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Doris Lessing: I didn't say any of that.

Laurie Dickstein: Did you really think that the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were good music?

Doris Lessing: That music was much less violent and loud than what we have now and I didn't mind it. I quite like rock and roll actually. About the grandchildren being more stupid than me, I didn't say that. I actually said that we're all getting, in my view, more stupid.

William Phillips: I was shocked before. I'm still in a state of shock. It's an obvious fact that the culture is in a state of decline. I don't know why you want to deny it. I think our children are less educated than we were. There are exceptions. Some are well educated, but when you talk about the mass of the country, there's been a decline in education. What does all the talk about education mean otherwise? Why are so many people concerned about the low state of education, the low state of learning? Is it all invented by a few political nuts?

Morris Dickstein: I think that kids today know more about a vast variety of topics, and have an ability to handle technology, flexibility of validity, that we didn't have. It's just a different curriculum out there, and to be prejudicial against that curriculum, if you will, or media, I find as startling as you find this shocking. I find it very shocking for somebody to say, as a given, that culture has declined. Because they get that information in a different way, there are things that they know nothing about. In other words, there are two things that they're very weak on, time and space. The reason that they don't know where Mexico is is that, as far as they know, Mexico is on television, and the reason that they don't know any history is because they're used to getting everything that happens in the world simultaneously on television.

Speaker: I don't think there was a golden time when they knew where Mexico was.

Morris Dickstein: There was a time when people got what was then a very conventional and what we all considered a very dull curriculum, in which we did learn where Mexico was and we did learn the names of the kings of France and we did learn the names of the kings of England and so on.

William Phillips: We also read serious books.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fred Ciporen: We still do.

Morris Dickstein: I think it's because they're getting information through the Internet and television and so on, that they get a lot more of certain kinds of information than we ever did, especially visual information. Other kinds of information, historical information or geographical information, they're hardly getting at all. That is a very dramatic change but it is not so clear that it's in decline across the board.

William Phillips: Not all information is equal.

Fred Siegel: Morris and Fred both have the same misconception. If you look at the society, of course many more kids are in school now and you can't prepare them all. If you look at the educated upper middle class, at the people who come out of the elite schools, kids graduate from Columbia, your alma mater, not knowing when the Civil War took place. You can graduate from Brown University and know nothing of American history. That has consequences, political consequences certainly, but the more important consequence is the loss of the ability to reason coherently and make an extended argument. That's true across the board no matter whom I've talked to. Now it's not all up and down hill. As a matter of fact, between the end of McCarthyism and the rise of political correctness, there was a golden age of American education. I remember in the late sixties, I was in Pittsburgh and we had a learning machine, new computers, and we were going to have super kids coming out of the computers. But what came out was super dreck. We had kids who knew how to play games but nothing else. What's important for democracy is people being able to reason about political issues, to debate them, not just vote on them, and that's being lost. If you want to argue for the dumbing down of the culture, watch the 6:30 news, which has turned information into little passion plays. It's a kind of soap opera. Part of the reason why some people don't feel there's a crisis is that they're so rich. The country's awash in money. Should there be a recession people might take this a little more seriously.

Marjorie Iseman: I want to suggest that the process of dumbing down began before television. I went to a "progressive" school and it was the avant garde. Fortunately, my father took us out because he couldn't stand us getting credit for grinding stone and blowing glass. The whole idea was that you didn't need to memorize, that learning things by rote was useless, that you learned by doing. If you were studying Egypt, you cooked Egyptian food. It was ridiculous, but much of that curriculum

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entered the school system and the whole idea of doing came long before television. It was a very powerful influence—anti-reading, anti-memorization, learning state by state what geography was.

Edith Kurzweil: We've touched a lot on American education. Still, while some of you went to the fancy schools, I was a refugee kid. I went to City College, which had a very different and exhaustive curriculum, that cost nothing. Excuse me: we paid $8 a semester, for library fees plus registration. You had a very rigid curriculum, courses in each of the hard sciences, in literature, languages, etc. of the kind you don't have in most universities anymore. But was this due to affluence? Do we have any more comments?

Joanna Rose: If no one has any more questions, I'd like to invite you all in for dessert and coffee or wine.

Coming in
Partisan Review:

- Susan Haack: *The Best Man for the Job May Be a Woman*
- New Fiction by Leonard Michaels
- Denis Donoghue reviews
  The Collected Works of T.E. Hulme
- Eugene Goodheart on Philip Roth
- J.D. McClatchy on David Ferry and Willard Spiegelman

New Poems by:

- Charles Wright
- James Laughlin
- W.S. DiPiero
- Christopher Middleton

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT WISTRICH

Understanding Hannah Arendt

Hannah Arendt has increasingly been recognized over the past three decades as one of the more original and significant political thinkers of our century. A German Jewess from an assimilated background who fled Hitler's Germany in 1933 (at the age of twenty-seven) and after eight years in France came to the United States as a refugee, Arendt was among the first to conceptualize our sense of totalitarianism as a deadly threat to the modern world and to provide new insights into the organized barbarism of the concentration camps. Trained in the tradition of German existentialist philosophy, she understood (more clearly than most) its limits as she sought to rethink the nature of political action in the light of twentieth century experience. Indeed, the relationship of experience to critical understanding, as Lisa Jane Disch shows in her crisply written study of Arendt's political writings, was a central focus of her work. According to Disch, she held that "storytelling," not explanation, was the work of the political theorist and insisted on the uniquely public character of action and of the self that it discloses. Storytelling was her way of dealing with events and their consequences in an age when the canons of historiography and political thought could no longer put "the past in order." It was the one possible solution to her skepticism about any claims to abstract universal validity in the human sciences. Storytelling for Arendt was a kind of judging of reality and experience, a reflection of her non-conformist outlook and

---

Books discussed in this essay:

HANNAH ARENDT AND THE LIMITS OF PHILOSOPHY. By Lisa Jane Disch. Cornell University Press $14.95.

ARENDT AND HEIDEGGER: THE FATE OF THE POLITICAL. By Dana Villa. Princeton University Press $37.50.

HANNAH ARENDT, KARL JASPERS, CORRESPONDENCE 1926-1969. Edited by Lotte Kohler and Hans Sauer. Translated from the German by Robert and Rita Kimber. Harcourt, Brace and Jovanich $49.95.

HANNAH ARENDT. ESSAYS IN UNDERSTANDING 1930-1954. Edited by Jerome Kohn. Harcourt, Brace and Co. $39.95.

HANNAH ARENDT AND THE JEWISH QUESTION. By Richard J. Bernstein. The M.I.T. Press $17.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

determination to defend the integrity of "living experience." Disch relates this emphasis to the Arendtian critique of Archimedean thinking with its claim to disinterested impartiality, based on a vantage-point outside space or time. The critique was eventually extended by her to the entire Western tradition of political philosophy from Plato through to the twentieth century.

Alongside the "tradition," Arendt began to develop her own original lexicon of politics, giving special importance to concepts like "plurality," "natality," and "publicity"—in the sense of a public realm in which everything "can be seen and heard by everybody." There were times when she seemed to identify the true meaning of public life with the ancient Greek polis; at other moments with the founding concepts of the American Republic; or even with the spontaneous democratic participation, ephemerally produced by the revolutionary councils' movement in modern European history. However, what remains characteristic of her work through all its shifts is the search for the lost public space—moral and cultural as well as geographical or political. This focus, as Disch's book suggests in the closing chapters, derived directly from Arendt's own experience of homelessness and marginality, a theme that had very much permeated her writings on Jewish identity and politics.

Such preoccupations also reflected the powerful philosophical influence of Martin Heidegger, who had been her most charismatic teacher (and lover) in the 1920s. Dana Villa's book is a new and thought-provoking rereading of both Arendt and Heidegger, which serves to correct some of the misconceptions of their critics and supporters alike. Villa regards Arendt as having picked up the challenge thrown down first by Nietzsche and then by Heidegger concerning the question of politics, *after* the death of metaphysics. She emerges in his account as the first postmetaphysical and *postmodern* political theorist who had thought through the implications of the break with "tradition"—the collapse of objective correlates to our values, ends, and purposes. Arendt would build on Heidegger's concept of homeless, "massified" people, the kind of rootlessness required by totalitarian regimes in their drive to destroy reality and achieve total domination. She was equally influenced by Heideggerian insights into nihilism and technology and by his contrast between authenticity and inauthenticity. Once she had detached Heidegger's philosophy from his politics, Arendt could further develop his existentialist analyses, while avoiding the irrationalist *cul-de-sac* that had led him towards National Socialism.

The Origins of Totalitarianism provides a phenomenology of totalitarian rule which owed more to Heideggerian concepts than is usually realized, while transmuting his vision to very different uses. Crucial to the Arendtian theses is that totalitarian domination seeks to refabricate man, to radically transform a human nature which is assumed to be infinitely malleable. In

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the totalitarian project, humanity is ultimately regarded as raw material to be reordered in the name of so-called laws of nature or history. It is precisely the superstitious belief in the existence of such supra-human impersonal forces, which (according to Arendt) legitimized the mass killing of whole races and classes in the twentieth century. She concluded that the Holocaust was made possible by a combination of totalitarian terror, technological hubris, and a nihilistic ideology in which the drive to exterminate ultimately became its own goal.

Arendt insisted that totalitarianism was a new and unique type of rule, one which presupposed the shattering of all earlier traditions in Europe. Her study of its "origins" was certainly not a conventional work of history—she was openly dismissive of "eunuch-like" striving for Rankean historical objectivity or the chronological arrangement of evidence so favored by most professional historians. What interested Arendt much more was to confront and try to overcome "the burden of our time," by exploring the "meaning" of the cataclysms she had lived through. In this pursuit she derived much encouragement from her former professor and teacher at Heidelberg, the philosopher Karl Jaspers. The correspondence between the two lasted for forty-three years (with a twelve-year hiatus during the Third Reich) until Jaspers' death in 1969. The letters before 1933 (when Arendt was briefly arrested and then emigrated from Nazi Germany) reflect a more formal professor/student relationship.

Jaspers supervised his pupil's dissertation on the late eighteenth-century Berlin salon hostess Rahel Varnhagen—a vivacious intellectual Jewess with whom Hannah Arendt had felt much in common. He was however critical of Arendt's reading of Rahel primarily in the context of the "Jewish Question," rather than as a human being liberated by the German *Aufklärung*. He felt that Arendt had failed to see Rahel whole, that she had missed her "greatness of soul" and misread Lessing and the Enlightenment as well. At one point Jaspers even wondered if Arendt's portrait would not be a "bonanza for antisemites"—this debate would continue right up to the belated first publication of the book in 1958. What lay behind these contrasting views were two radically different conceptions of German, Jewish, and German-Jewish identity.

Even before 1933, the young Hannah Arendt did not share Jaspers' enthusiasm for the "imposing patriotism" of Max Weber, his equation of the German "essence" with rationality and humanity, or his romantic notions of German historical destiny. Jaspers later modified these views and after 1937 belonged to the "inner emigration" in Germany (Arendt even declared that he embodied what was left of *humanitas* in the country), but the German-Jewish identity tension remained intact, despite their warm friendship and mutual trust. Although Jaspers always claimed her as a "German,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she would insist (as in 1946) that politically "I will speak only in the name of the Jews. . . ." Arendt, to her credit, never tried to gloss over the fact that she had been expelled from Germany as a Jewess and maintained that her Germanness was strictly a matter of mother tongue and love of German philosophy and literature.

Jaspers (himself married to a Jewess) could never quite fathom this willful keeping of distance by Arendt (who was married to Heinrich Blücher, a German Gentile ex-Communist); a particularist residue which somehow contradicted his enlightenment philosophy. In a long letter of 1952 about Rahel Varnhagen, he commented that Arendt's book made one feel that "if a person is a Jew he cannot really live his life to the full" and that the Jewish factor was too much in the foreground. Arendt did not deny this but felt that her longstanding critique of Jewish assimilation in Germany (which had been inspired by her earlier Zionist beliefs) was still valid. Arendt, of course, had long since changed her views on Zionism and criticized Jaspers' admiration for Israel's conduct in the Suez crisis as politically naïve. Her jaundiced view of the Jewish State found even sharper expression in her highly controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963)—a work which Jaspers nonetheless considered to be profound.

In this work, even more than in her studies of totalitarianism, Arendt tended to locate the sources of antisemitism within Jewish history rather than in external forces. In the eyes of many critics Arendt dangerously blurred the line between Nazi executioners and Jewish victims. This tendency already appears in a letter of 1946 to Jaspers where Arendt draws a bizarre (some might say perverse) symmetry between Nazis and Jews on the matter of guilt and innocence. She wrote that "the Germans are burdened now with thousands or hundreds of thousands of people who cannot be adequately punished within the legal system; and we Jews are burdened with millions of innocents by reason of which every Jew alive today can see himself as innocence personified." Jaspers avoided comment on this extraordinary statement but instead came out strongly against any attempt to see an element of "satanic greatness" in Nazism or a "demonic" element in Hitler. This admonition may well have provided the seed of Arendt's shift in the late 1950s from her earlier notion of the "radical evil" in totalitarianism, to what Jaspers described as the "total banality" of the Nazis.

It was also Jaspers who gently urged Arendt to present her theses "in a historically more correct and less visionary way," to reflect more on method and to avoid investing history with a false grandeur. At the same time, he saw the vividness and originality that underlay some of Arendt's conceptions; her insight into the death camps as the laboratory of Nazism and into the totalitarian mentality that proclaimed "everything is possible;" her sharp analysis of statelessness, abstract human rights, and the superfluousness that paved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the way for totalitarian rule; her acute sense of Nazism as arising out of the collapse of all Europe's social and political structures, of its cultural traditions and moral standards.

Jaspers recognized the tendency of his temperamental former student to overexaggerate, to make sweeping generalizations, to ignore causal relationships and disregard empirical facts. However, the disagreements between Jaspers and Arendt were never of a kind that could threaten the solidarity of their friendship or the openness of their dialogue. For Arendt, he was a kind of surrogate father, a vital element of continuity in her life, the teacher ("the only one I have ever been able to recognise as such")—who by the gift of friendship had helped anchor her love of the world. For Jaspers, she was quite simply "a prodigal human being."

Jerome Kohn's compilation of Arendt's lesser-known essays between 1930 and 1954, very usefully complements the moving and frequently riveting Jasper-Arendt correspondence. Kohn, who was at one time Arendt's assistant at the New School for Social Research in New York, has included a very broad range of themes, beginning with some of her earliest published work on St. Augustine, Kierkegaard, Friedrich von Gentz, the Berlin salons, the emancipation of women, on Kafka, the French existentialists, religion and politics, Communism and the Fascist International. The book is a selection of Arendt's uncollected and (largely) unpublished writings—including manuscripts of lecture materials and book reviews that were exercises in thinking with or against a particular author. There is also a revealing interview with the German journalist Günter Gaus entitled "What Remains? The Language Remains," which dates from 1964 and opens the book. This was one of the rare occasions in which Arendt spoke personally about her life (especially her youth), her political awakening, her feelings about the German language and about Jaspers.

The book offers us a valuable glimpse into Arendt's workshop, into the process by which she gradually arrived at some of the crucial distinctions that subsequently marked her oeuvre: the difference between the public and private realms of experience, her analysis of the meaning of "homelessness," of political action, as well as the tradition of philosophy that began with Plato and culminated in Marx. It also reveals her precocious concern with the "question of European unity" and the need for a new beginning—for a European federation of states in the post-war world. We can also find in these essays the sources of her distinction between "organized guilt" and "universal responsibility" as well as her belief that the German people had no "monopoly of guilt" for the inhuman crimes of a racist ideology. As Kohn puts it in his introduction: "She felt that the defeat of the Nazis ought not to be greeted with euphoria; her response was not victorious exultation, but a profound lament over the destruction of German culture."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Kohn's collection, there are many references to Jews as victims of the Nazis, scattered all the way through Arendt's earlier writings, but no systematic inquiry into her views on the "Jewish Question." Richard Bernstein's new book splendidly fills this gap, demonstrating how her attempts to understand specifically Jewish issues helped to shape her thinking about politics in general and the life of the mind. Arendt's life-story, from the tumultuous last years in Weimar through her precarious existence in Paris as a stateless Jewess in the 1930s and her involvement in Zionist politics in America before 1948, strongly oriented her thinking. The ground of experience rather than theories guided her at all times and as she told Jaspers in 1946: "I have refused to abandon the Jewish question as the focal point of my historical and political thinking." Bernstein, who is Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research, takes us with care and precision through the various stages of Arendt's involvement as an engaged Jewish intellectual. Her early identification with the "conscious pariah" as rebel and independent thinker, her attempts to understand antisemitism as a political ideology, her reflections on statelessness and the totalitarian hell; her attraction to and subsequent break with Zionism; her abiding fascination with the failed revolutionary experiments of the modern age; and above all in the closing chapters, he gives us a probing examination of her meditations on the fundamental nature of evil.

Bernstein clearly shows that the starting-point of Arendt's analysis was her perception of the Jews' lack of preparation for the vicious political antisemitism that emerged in fin-de-siècle Europe. This failure, according to Arendt, derived partly from the Jews' political inexperience as a people, from fatal flaws in the emancipation contract and the nineteenth-century European nation-state system and from an inability of most Jews to grasp the supra-national, political character of the new antisemitism. Dissatisfied as she was with the classical liberal tradition (which had refused to recognise Jews as a distinct people), Arendt insisted that "when one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew." But as Bernstein points out, what she meant by being a Jew, or by Jewishness as opposed to Judaism, is far from clear. Indeed, it is one of his more penetrating criticisms, that Arendt avoided the tough questions about Jewish identity and had little feeling for, or interest in, the religious aspects of Judaism.

One might well add that this blind spot also distorted much of Arendt's perspective on Jewish history as a whole. She tended to see the modern history of the Jews through the rather constricting lens of a struggle between Jewish financial cliques, philanthropists, pariahs, and parvenus. From the French Dreyfusard and revolutionary Zionist, Bernard Lazare, she had learned to adopt the stance of the "conscious pariah" and to argue that Jews must assume political responsibility, to fight for their rights as Jews. Arendt's strictures had a certain subjective logic in the 1930s but they were grossly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overstated when she suggested that the Jewish people had avoided political action for two millennia!

Equally problematic was her insistence on seeing modern anti-Semitism as inextricably connected to imperialism and to the collapse of the nation-state–an assumption that reflected her dismissive and rather superficial view of modern nationalism. Not only was her own explanation of the roots of modern anti-Semitism seriously flawed (overstressing as it did the pan-movements and their supra-national aspects) but she offered no concrete indication as to what might have constituted an adequate Jewish response to Nazism. However, Bernstein rightly points to Arendt's insights into the significance of the Nazi camps and their *anti-utilitarian* function. He also shows how many of her concepts of action and politics ultimately derived from her incisive analysis of total domination.

In 1945, Hannah Arendt declared: "The problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe." She proved factually wrong but in the 1990s this dismal failure of postwar intellectuals to confront such a central issue is coming to haunt us all. Arendt, at least, tried to grapple with it, however unsatisfactorily. Initially, she had believed in the existence of the Kantian notion of "radical evil," re-interpreting it to mean the act of making human beings superfluous as human beings. Subsequently, as in her Eichmann book, evil became "banal"—a case of monstrous deeds without monstrous motives—best accounted for, so she believed, by her category of thoughtlessness. But this notion, too, hardly resolves the issue, though Bernstein does a good job in unpacking the context and meaning of Arendt's controversial theory about the "banality of evil"—revealing both her insights and her blindness.

Bernstein makes a convincing case that some of Arendt's deepest concerns about history and politics were indeed shaped by her writings on the Jewish question, without being reducible to them. Her earliest concerns had been to open a space for the possibility of a Jewish politics, for a new beginning that would rupture the paralyzing historical continuities of Diasporic existence. For a time she found her answer in Zionism, but by 1948 she had become seriously disillusioned with Zionist ideology and politics, which in her eyes had abandoned its revolutionary promise. Henceforth, her main effort was devoted to understanding politics and the world in which she lived–a world which had witnessed evil that was both radical and banal. It was through the unending process of understanding (thinking and judging) as Hannah Arendt once wrote, that "we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world." Each of these books in their different ways testify to the seriousness of her effort and help us to understand Hannah Arendt's own thought, in all its tensions and inner complexity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GEOFFREY HARTMAN

Shoah and Intellectual Witness

The culture of remembrance is at high tide, but we cannot foresee how far it will reach, or how much will remain valuable. At present, three generations are preoccupied with Holocaust memory. They are the eyewitnesses; their children, the second generation, who have subdued some of their ambivalence and are eager to know their parents better; and the third generation, grand-children who treasure the personal stories of relatives now slipping away. Bonds of love reinforce the golden chain of oral tradition, which had been in danger of breaking, because of terrible and burdensome experiences that could not be integrated into family life. Among the first generation there are also child survivors, the last direct witnesses, whose significance increases when we focus on adolescence and pedagogy.

As the tide recedes and eyewitnesses pass from the scene, public memory of the Shoah, so crucial to contemporary thought, is increasingly affected by new events and contexts—by the continuance of history. According to an old saying, truth is the daughter of time; we might also say that whatever leads to disclosure, there is always a difference in the reception of that disclosure between a community that feels close to the event and the public at large.

In another twenty or forty years a community sensitive to matters touching on the Shoah will be more of a public; that is, it will respond in a more complex or self-reflective way. I wish to call *intellectual witness* an active reception that is relevant both for our time and the encroaching future, that could address with similar force a community and the public. I will be looking at the possibility of intellectual witness in those who did not directly experience the Nazi era as well as in survivors whose writings are extant and exemplary.

The idea of intellectual witness is overdetermined. "Witness," unless employed in a specifically legal or religious sense, is usually limited to eyewitness testimony. But then we would not ordinarily qualify it by "intellectual," since it is the immediacy, the sheer, wounding weight of experience that counts. In *The Longest Shadow* I used the expression "second generation witness," a concept that made sense because the pressure of the event on the sons and daughters of the survivors was such that "witness" seemed justified. Almost imperceptibly, however, the phrase

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

broadened to embrace what Terrence des Pres and Lawrence Langer name "secondary witness"—a concept without generational limit. It includes all who could be called witnesses because they are still in touch with the first generation or who look at the Shoah not as something enclosed in the past but as a contemporary issue requiring an intensity of representation close to eyewitness report. But should the term "witness" still apply, three generations and over fifty years from the event? And why substitute "intellectual" for "secondary" to characterize those who portray the Shoah with a special sense of obligation?

The first question is somewhat easier to answer than the second. The Holocaust refuses to disappear into time's "dark backward and abysm." It has created a magnetic field stronger than that of the First World War. ("The Great War is a magnet," Wyndham Lewis wrote in the 1930s, "the 'postwar' its magnetic field.") In 1985, on the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of the camps, Jürgen Habermas declared, "The presence of the past remains uncannily real and preoccupies discussion more forcefully today than in the 1950s and early 60s." Nazi history, Amos Elon wrote in 1997, "seems more 'alive' now than it did 30 or 40 years ago. Few people then would have foreseen that it would still weigh so heavily in the public life and culture of Germany. . . .It is a shadow that not only lengthens but also darkens as time goes by."

There is nothing mysterious about this. The Germans were unable to mourn, according to the Mitscherlichs, who published a famous book on that subject. A reluctance to confront what happened, both in public life (where many Nazis remained in the government) and in the intimacy of the family, not only postponed the reckoning but made it more painful when public memory refocused on the perpetrators in the 60s and 70s. The delayed impact made Helmut Kohl's remark about a later generation's "luck" (*die Gnade der späten Geburt*) particularly inept. In France, the role of the police as enforcers in the roundup and deportation of Jews was occulted into the eighties and in Poland, where the Shoah had been an open and daily reality, full acknowledgment has still not come. A battle over the conscience of that nation continues to this day because many Poles were both victims and onlookers. For them the historical trauma is the war itself, the double aggression of Hitler and Stalin. Sometimes collaborators in the Holocaust, more often powerless or unwilling to intervene, they did not face the moral issue until Lanzmann's *Shoah* appeared and in the wake of a courageous article by Jan Blonski.

Eventually the "memory-wave" surged everywhere and individual testimonies gained new life. The survivors began to speak and write once more, especially after the Eichmann trial, and the claim of the second generation to family memories of which they had been deprived by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

murder of relatives and the destruction of their culture produced an explosive return to the event. Memories that do not exist have to be replaced; with Georges Perec and others new fictional modes are created, not so much to fill a void as to make it visible, to "present memory *as* empty" (Henri Raczymow).

Despite attempts to forget, then, and dire warnings about the obsessive effect of Holocaust consciousness, interest has reached a new high. The passing of the survivor does not mean the passing of witness. Many have become witnesses by adoption and investigate what happened with religious fervor. What should be called the reception or resonance, rather than understanding, of the Shoah, is, when measured against the lapse of time, a disruptive series of revelations following upon a latency period lasting from shortly after the war to the Eichmann trial in 1961. In this democidal century, each further genocide does not weaken the memory of the Shoah but revives it as an event that founded the exemplarity of testimonial acts.

Let me turn, then, to the second question: how appropriate is the slippery term "intellectual" to this intense and continued interest in the Holocaust? I have indicated that if anything threatens remembrance today it is not, so far, our increasing distance from the catastrophe. A more constitutive distance, however, intrinsic to intellectual inquiry, does matter profoundly and we have some difficulty with it when it comes to radically shocking events. Yet without a struggle for or against that distance, our reception of what happened is impoverished.

The intellectual, a descendent of the Enlightenment's "impartial spectator" (important to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*), plays a role similar to that of a bystander *after the event* who observes it from an ambiguous position. On the one hand, detached or belated, he has no obligation to take account of the Shoah. On the other, once he learns what happened and does nothing—treats it as of little or no concern—he is not unlike an observer of the event who failed to react.

The position of those implicated in this way can also be compared to that of a spectator in the theater. This analogy, though it may seem offensive, is challenging and suggests how intrinsic art is to moral perception. Spectators go to see a tragedy and their judgment remains active despite the sympathetic imagination provoked by what unfolds on stage. The distance between spectator and tragic action is bridged, if at all, without psychological transvestism (permitted and even necessary for the actors); yet most viewers, while they might not feel pain, would not admit taking pleasure from a suffering that is known to have been actual rather than imaginary. In fact, we find it so difficult to value the feeling of pleasure, or seeming mastery, that comes from the ability to face painful events through

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought or mimesis, that we justify this voluntary witnessing as a kind of labor. Dominick LaCapra, for example, describes it as a "labor of listening and attending that exposes the self to empathetic understanding and hence to at least muted trauma."

In such statements, the labor metaphor not only removes the suspicion of illegitimate enjoyment but modifies the spectator theory of knowledge by evoking a more participatory state of mind. As LaCapra suggests, it seems impossible to experience something so traumatic as the Shoah, even at a distance, without suffering a secondary form of trauma. In the political sphere, we often talk of a person being "radicalized." A parallel radicalization among the survivors as well as those coming later is evidenced by their consuming effort to "see," to find a way of telling others—and even themselves—what happened.

The artistic intellect, combining with the testimonial imperative, plays an especially effective role in capturing and communicating a traumatic ordeal. In *Literature or Life* (its original title was *Writing or Death*), Jorge Semprun confronts "deadly riches" of memory that surge when he happens on a film about the camps a few months after his liberation from Buchenwald. "Seeing on the screen, under an April sun so near and yet so far away, the *Appellplatz* of Buchenwald, where cohorts of survivors were milling about in the disarray of their recovered freedom, I saw myself brought back to the reality of it, installed once more in the truth of an incontrovertible experience. Everything, then, had been real, and continued to be so: nothing had been a dream." To counter the phantomization or dissociation endemic to trauma and the ensuing fragility of transmission, a medium more permanent than individual mind is necessary. Art and the communal memory interact to achieve this end.

Yet a postwar hunt to de-aestheticize art blocked the question as to whether the pleasure derived from it could have ethical value when its subject is the Shoah's enormous, state-sponsored atrocities. The issue was displaced by Adorno's famous strictures. His emphasis fell exclusively on the moral difficulty of representing—or admitting into thought—a catastrophe of such magnitude. Adorno does not doubt our technical powers of mimesis but our moral and intellectual stamina. The horror of the Shoah must never be stylized, or become fodder (*Frass*) to satisfy a craving for entertainment.

Indeed, what pleasure could result from art that depicts the Shoah? Perhaps there is no single, unified feeling and therefore no single word like "pleasure" that adequately describes it. But whatever we name that response, it cannot be related to a delight in imitation and only with many qualifications to emotional catharsis. In part it involves a distinction between memory and imagination. Those who cannot remember because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of massive trauma or because they have lost places and people whose names and photos still haunt them must recover some of that lost density of life (or specificity of death) through an imaginative recreation. They work from "post-memory," as Marianne Hirsch calls it, to lessen its emptiness; and that very effort, impossible or grotesque, is often part of the subject.

Some comfort, then, however tenuous, may come from this imaginative effort. Yet those who can remember also need relief—from a tormenting sense of discontinuity, which, as I have mentioned, phantomizes the survivor. So one of Charlotte Delbo's characters declares, "I am not among the living. I died in Auschwitz, and no one notices it." Semprun too, brooding on Primo Levi's suicide, feels compelled to ask: "Have we really survived?"

The rhythm of Semprun's entire book enacts a tension between deathly (*mortifères*) recollections and his activist postwar life. No incident he recounts is merely punctual or described without being returned to, elaborated, mixed with associations, reprised. Semprun uses these liberties of fiction to integrate threatening anniversary symptoms of his Buchenwald trauma. He objects to the film about the camps by evoking the difference between documentary realism and lived reality. "The film," he writes, "should have been worked through, in its filmic substance, by arresting the march of images, by fixing an image to enlarge certain details: sometimes the projection should have been slowed, and, at other times, speeded up. Above all, the scenes should have been provided with a commentary, to make them less cryptic, to place them not only in historical context but in a continuum of thoughts and emotions. . . .In short, documentary reality should have been handled like fictional material."

Semprun may be taking his cue from Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*, which appeared a full decade after the war. Resnais filters Holocaust reality through the self-conscious use of cinematic techniques and a poetic voice-over commentary. Semprun too, as novelist or memoirist, is influenced by the cinema. Yet he does not share Adorno's anxiety about mass media or the aesthetic exploitation of the Holocaust.

I believe that the problematic nature of Holocaust representation does not arise primarily from a temptation to aestheticize that reality (though Semprun's self-conscious devices serve to buffer as well as acknowledge shock). It comes, rather, from the damaged condition of modern life—damaged severely enough to affect its communicable core. On this issue Adorno was clear-sighted. Modern experience, he declared in *Minima Moralia*, is becoming less communicable, perhaps even unthinkable. A comment by Jürgen Habermas, the best-known philosopher of contemporary Germany, suggests both this damage and the hope of undoing it. The Holocaust has touched "the deep stratum of solidarity between all who bear a human countenance." Restoring that solidarity, that *entente*, is what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

motivates public remembrance as a collect of testimonial voices and a collective of hearers. It also motivates our greatest writers after the war.

Their effort is shadowed, however, by a temptation that has not been talked about very much and which stems from intimacy rather than aesthetic or intellectual distancing. Writers often transgress a boundary. Imaginative power can push them across a threshold into over-identifying with victims or a victimized generation, to the point of seeking a mystical correspondence with the dead. (One thinks of Nelly Sachs but also of Walter Benjamin's suggestion that "a secret date" exists between past generations and the present one.) Documentary or reified detail, in any case, does not satisfy the bereaved imagination, which demands a greater, more fully imagined solidarity.

This desire for solidarity is reinforced by a fraternal ideal inspired by the French Revolution and the international camaraderie of the Spanish Civil War; it makes Semprun choose for one of his epigraphs Malraux's "I seek the crucial region of the soul where absolute evil stands in opposition to fraternity." As an *imaginative* need, however, the solidarity-drive is equally present in Ida Fink's stories. Having escaped death by passing as a Christian, she looks back from the position of bystander as well as victim and expresses in various ways a temptation to join those who disappeared, to envision their end by merging with them. Yet the compassionate thinker should not try to identify with the victims any more than the teller of a story with its characters. "I should not have written 'we,'" one of Fink's narrators confesses, "for I was not standing in the ranks [of those rounded up for deportation and death]. . . ."

Every identification approaches over-identification and leads to a personifying and then appropriation of the identity of others. The distance between self and other is violated and the possibility of intellectual witness aborted. So, too, Lanzmann's identification with the witnesses in his film *Shoah* is bound to be anti-intellectual. His angry, quasi-religious comments about the "obscenity" of seeking to understand the Holocaust betray this. He remains, at the same time, very present in the film as an ironic and often domineering questioner. He relentlessly pressures the victims as if uninterested in their human needs or their life beyond the traumatic event and subordinates all other considerations to a revelation of the event in its full horror.

Artists like these reveal that the intellectual part of consciousness always keeps us in the position of spectator or bystander. It is a deeply uncomfortable place to be in, because we are exposed, at one and the same time, to trauma *and* the anxiety of not empathizing enough. In this crucial area little can guide us. We say, for instance, that, on the part of historian as well

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as artist, there must be partial identification or some kind of emotional relation: a rational or therapeutic empathy that does not result in compulsive bonding or ecstatic loss of self. Like LaCapra we are tempted to use Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" to distinguish between "working through" and "acting out."

Yet everything we know about empathy suggests how destabilizing it is. The memory of atrocity is often haunted by images of the human body violated by torture, as in the case of Jean Améry, or by random and savage acts of mutilation. What can empathy mean here? It is at best an excape from disremembering dismemberment, and somehow pieceing together the afflicted body through a narrative courage that evokes the once *integral* person. Empathy can also surprise and go out to the ex-perpetrators, the very people who betrayed the principle of human solidarity. Drawing a lesson from his own imprisonment in Dachau and Buchenwald, Robert Antelme insists that the perpetrators remain persons, subjects with rights, members of humanity. "From now on a man who is imprisoned is a man we have to 'think' about; we are able to identify with him" (*nous sommes dans son intimité*).

Fraternity, however, extended from immediate blood relations to nation or mankind has proved to be a corruptible ideal. Instead of reinforcing the concept of humanity, of Antelme's *espèce humaine*, it turned coercive and underwrote the political religions of fascism and Stalinism. Even in its Christian form it is not as universal as it claims to be, and it often subordinates humanitarian perspectives to fervid national demands. An exploited ideal, then, helped to promote the German *Volksgemeinschaft* and its crimes against humanity, yet it could not be discarded after the Holocaust.

The quality of postwar intellectualism, however, is influenced by that fact. Hoping to discover less corruptible forms of solidarity, contemporary writers have subjected the language of social and ethical thought to a painfully complex scrutiny. As a consequence, public discourse is sometimes jeopardized by the very means adopted to save it, the deconstruction of commonplaces and the outwitting of words emotionally abused by totalitarian regimes. I will instance only Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*, which explores, among other texts, Maurice Blanchot's *Friendship* and *The Writing of the Disaster*. Blanchot belongs to the generation that matured before the war, but he survived an earlier self marked by right-wing journalistic agitation. Central to Blanchot's and Derrida's efforts is the attempt to reexamine and radicalize an older ideal: that of friendship. By the time they have analyzed it and removed solace and sentimentality, it poses a significant challenge to the intoxicating mass appeal of fraternity, community, humanity. Yet the anxiety of being seduced by words also creates a less communicative style, one that saves friendship by becoming less reader-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

friendly. The style may have a realism of its own, however: in the words of Yves Bonnefoy, it "aggravates instead of resolving, points to what remains obscure, takes clarities to be clouds that can always be dissipated. . . ."

Having described some aspects of intellectual witnessing, I want to turn to the intellectual as witness. Without seeking a firm definition of the intellectual, I can say that the Holocaust made his status even more problematic. The obvious reason for this is related to the behavior of many well-educated Europeans, especially those Max Weinreich called "Hitler's professors." After Hitler and Stalin, Irving Howe once wrote, "intellectuals must never, no matter what the occasion or pretext, allow themselves to provide ideological rationales for the suppression of liberty." But there is also a less obvious reason for doubt about the professional thinker: while writers, journalists, and academics in Nazi-occupied Europe were often active accomplices, there was also a large group who waited it out as bystanders. The very concept, therefore, of bystander seems tainted. Given the passivity of so many who knew or could have known, is it possible *now* to "stand and wait"?

A clear sign of our impatience with the bystander mentality is the controversy over America's and also the Yishuv's (relative) inaction during the War Against the Jews. The dubious claim, moreover, that most Germans were ignorant onlookers, shielded from or accidentally happening upon the murderous events, has often been challenged and may not recover from Daniel Goldhagen's recent book. Also important is a renewed and exacting interest in rethinking agency and culpability.

The intellectual's situation is paradoxical. If, yielding to the call for action, he engages himself on one side or the other and that side loses, he finds himself compromised. If, avoiding action, he becomes a bystander who takes his time, anti-intellectualism increases. Intellectuals tend to be among the most pressured groups in society. But the most significant factor affecting *all* bystanders since 1945 is that the technology of real-time reporting now brings every disaster and evil in the world to our attention and so takes away all excuse. Through the media we become onlookers exposed to daily violence and global misery in the same quasi-involuntary way that Germans after 1933 were directly exposed to overt incidents and vicious propaganda. These bystanders saw yet did not see what was before their eyes.

Media exposure, then, may lead to more tension than ever between knowing and not-knowing, between a guilty conscience and deliberate palliation or forgetting. The constant spectacle of misery is already causing a low-grade, perpetual anxiety. The very absence of feeling pains us instead of the pain we think we should be feeling. We suffer a split, so that one part of us cannot accept an insensibility for which the other quietly decrees for-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

giveness. And, after Bitburg, the issue of premature closure, or what Adorno called *erpresste Versöhnung* (coerced reconciliation), comes to the fore. Instead of the passage of time setting a limit to liability, the delay—as often in fictional narratives—may now be deemed necessary to a full disclosure of trauma or guilt. In sum, the innocence of the bystanders has become less clear with the passage of time.

It is natural to focus on the bystander, for in the last fifty years, while scholarly and critical interest shifted from perpetrator to survivor (or rescuer) and back, the bystander was often neglected. The category is somewhat vague and confronts us with the ambiguities of Primo Levi's "gray zone," in which the demarcation between victim and collaborator, or bystander and collaborator, remains unclear. Bystanders after the event, however, such as the belated thinker and artist, struggle with a different dilemma. As in epitaphic inscriptions admonishing the traveller, a voice comes from the past and each must decide whether to heed it or pass by.

This moment of brooding is essential. We know that during catastrophe there is not enough time; thought is needed for coping, for meeting the emergency. After the crisis, however, an awareness that it had, if not an end, then a datable structure leads to a repeated act of recall that tries to become a reflection. We experience, as after a nightmare or serious illness, a feeling of relief, even of gratitude, that the immediate danger is over. The intolerable, though we did not know it directly, gives way to perplexity: how could it happen, how could they let it happen? And, since daily pressures, not only catastrophic ones, short-circuit this kind of reflective time, it has to be maintained and refurbished—despite the taint of spectatorship or the bitterness of the victim. So Tadeusz Borowski writes in *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*: "We were filthy and died real deaths. They were 'aesthetic' and carried on subtle debates."

Catastrophe, then, reduces time. As the threat advances, we rapidly lose the reflective space needed for decision-making. Any kind of playing for time becomes impossible. Fink describes how haste and hesitation prove equally fatal during the Nazi roundups. In such moments, however, moral actions do occur, whether or not they succeed. The father in "A Spring Morning" fails to save his child: she runs at his urging toward the safety of some bystanders and is shot down. If we see his decision, nevertheless, as a brave act, it is because of the closeness of the family previously portrayed by Ida Fink. We infer the father's moral courage in separating from the child.

Eventually an indefinite respite allows us to make time for time; and this recapture is humanizing. Those murdered in the Shoah, Habermas writes, "have a claim to the weak anamnestic power of a solidarity which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

those born later [he is thinking mainly of young Germans] can now only practice through the medium of memory." Habermas's "weak anamnestic power," and Benjamin's "weak messianic power" to which it alludes, suggest something potentially redemptive, insofar as historical knowledge is converted into remembrance or the risk—through art—of an anabasis, a descent to the dead, is undertaken.

But is there an aesthetic truth—is art a form of intelligence as trustworthy as historical or scientific inquiry? This long-standing debate revives again. Before "aesthetic" became a dirty word, the rubric of "aesthetic distance" had a place in the analysis and judgment of works of art. Though often superficially understood, the concept made us aware of the artist's responsibility *vis-à-vis* subject-matter and audience. The Greeks fined playwrights who merely quickened their pain or fear; and Primo Levi, in "The Memory of Offense," shows how difficult it is to be a messenger of bad news—also to oneself. I suspect that aesthetic distance struggles with a dissociation that results from trauma and seeks to achieve a balance between over- and under-identification. The key factor here is art's decorum of disclosure, its sense of *timing.*

We receive a strong impression of such timing from a text which represents the opposite of Holocaust annihilation: the ritual creation-sequence that opens *Genesis.* God takes time out to recognize or bless what He has made. An image of sheer power is modified by this predialogic acknowledgement of creature by creator. But periods of decreation—when we are devastated or returned to nothing—are something else. Time as the steadfast ground of being has disappeared; how do we talk *then* with the traumatized part of ourselves or others? What kind of dialogue or recognition is possible?

Entmündigte Lippe, writes Paul Celan, *melde / dass etwas geschieht, noch immer, / Unweit von dir.* I can only paraphrase, not translate. "Mouthless, disenfranchized lips: announce that something is still happening, not far from you." Those who are lost, though far away, never disappear completely. Active in memory or activated by fantasy, their internalized presence may be so haunting that our own voice is jeopardized and becomes mute. Written words, silent but not mute, represent a compromise; and the tradition of written art, or rhythmic and ritual forms, will try to reintegrate something of the lost world, despite pain or trauma. The combination of form and feeling in art or some other, more discursive recovery of hermeneutic patience is especially effective in creating a mode of disclosure. The very difficulty, however, of "seeing" an event of such human ferocity, or of presenting it *untraumatically,* should make us more cautious about an axiom of our culture: that, to quote Justice Brandeis, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What are the chances, then, of encouraging an inter-generational conversation, through art or essays, to forestall silence and solipsism? Though "conversation," in this context, is a misnomer, I have yet to find a better word. To introduce facts about the Shoah into casual talk—or even into the less casual space of the classroom—produces an embarrassed silence. Silence of this kind can be propadeutic, however, a step toward mature conversation, toward that very *Mündigkeit* by which Kant defined the enlightened person or humanity's collective exodus from a self-incurred *Unmündigkeit*.

The conversation I consider essential to intellectual witness includes such questions as: Was suffering meant to end in a book or a movie? Must every good story presuppose a fascination with crime and disaster, with the heart of darkness? Can we look at the calamity of the Holocaust without taking some comfort from representation, discursive or artistic? Has the culture in which it happened changed? Does emphasis on the Shoah raise the suspicion that the Jewish community is monopolizing suffering, or is there a way of bringing this disaster into the framework of comparative genocide? Are there moral lessons to be drawn from the Holocaust, more compelling than a vague appeal to humanitarian or democratic values?

As time passes and the terror that threatened to blank the screen is lessened by the very stories and pictures that accumulate as partial defenses against that blankness, we are obliged to think of the problems that surround the transmission of the Holocaust as a living memory. What if such a legacy—as it is now called—has a despairing or traumatizing effect and the "Never Forget" becomes an impossibility? Finally, is there a limit to the bitter logic of accusation or does that always depend on the triage of particular ideologies?

When the topic is the Holocaust, moreover, the cautions that weigh on intellectual essays are sometimes distinct from those that burden artistic or fictional projects. In art, scruples about representability often take over: can or should the Shoah be depicted in graphic and realistic ways? But in intellectual witness the constraint comes more from an equivalent to the third than the second commandment: "Thou shalt not refer to the Holocaust in vain."

We are always under the injunction not to multiply words needlessly. In the matter of the Shoah, however, "silence" takes on a particular value, and speaking and writing are more at risk than in fictional modes, which often experiment with shock, or create, through the magic of art, what Boileau called "agreeable monsters." Silence as a value does not mean keeping quiet but evokes an internal monitor or threshold demon. The way we write about the Shoah has a bearing on the viability of culture after the Shoah.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In conclusion, "intellectual witness" is partial to itself: it brings forward those aspects of rationality that contribute to humanity, those writers who refuse to sacrifice their intellect despite the inhumanity of modern experience. Although I will not enter into arguments about Gadamer's ideal of "conversation" or Habermas's "communicative action," these relate rationality to democracy and continue to challenge a skeptical or *realpolitik* doctrine of social survival. In such debates the intellect becomes a witness to its own survival rather than being seduced into guilt, self-flagellation or abdication.

Witnessing, moreover, cannot take place without some hope in the future, in generational transmission. Perhaps all writing presupposes this hope—the manuscript in a bottle as well as the buried milk canisters of Ringelblum's "Oneg Shabbat." Yet the scorched intelligibility Nazism left behind and modern efforts to rebuild and recover from it in a time of accelerating change have produced an uncertainty about who will transmit, or who can identify long enough with a self to become a subject, to establish a consistent sense of place, emplacement, belonging.

Because the identity of the survivors is so thoroughly shaped by their experience, this may not seem to be an important consideration. But the literature puts us on our gurard. The Nazi Holocaust systematically denied the victim any identity except of the most shameful and dehumanized kind. An unbridgeable gulf appeared between being human and being a Jew. "If This be a Man" is Primo Levi's title for his Auschwitz experience. "A different creator made me," Dan Pagis writes, comparing the shade (*zel*) he has become to the booted, uniformed guards usurping the *zelem elohim*, the image of God. The victim's identity became a non-identity. It is far too easy to claim that 1945 brought reversal and restoration. Who is speaking, who is testifying, if Paul Celan speaks truly when he says: "Speaks true who speaks shadow"?

Here the necessary function of intellectual, or secondary, witnessing is disclosed once more. It provides a witness for the witness, it actively receives words that reflect the darkness of the event. For "blackbird" Celan, for Ancel/Amsel, intelligibility is not the aim of witnessing. His poetry does not shine in the darkness to abolish it. Rather, the poetic word is as "darkness to a dying flame." Celan's skeletalized "I" testifies to the missing other as well as the missing self, the "you" or "we," what Maurice Halbwachs called the "affective community" (basis of all memory) and Michael Pollak called the need for social identity. Intellectual witness stands in for that "you" or "we" by a commitment to the survivors' or eyewitnesses' words. Like literature itself it moves within the damaged space of speech, specifically conscious of past betrayals and caught between the distancing and the discovery value of time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MILLICENT BELL

Fiction Chronicle

THE COMPLETE STORIES. By Bernard Malamud. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $35.00.
THE PUTTERMESSER PAPERS. By Cynthia Ozick. Alfred A. Knopf. $32.00.
A CYNTHIA OZICK READER. Edited by Elaine M. Kauvar. Indiana University Press. $39.95.
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SON. By Norman Mailer. Random House. $22.00.
THE OLD RELIGION. By David Mamet. The Free Press. $24.00.

In 1954, this magazine published "The Magic Barrel," which was an immediate sensation. One previous story of Bernard Malamud's had appeared in these pages and a few others elsewhere, but he was mostly known as the author of *The Natural*, a first novel that gave no hint of the vision and voice he had begun to use in short fiction. When, thirty years later, Robert Redford appeared on movie screens as Malamud's slugger, Roy Hobbes, the novelist was pleased that the film (although it had happy-ended his story) gave notice that he had not been merely a "Jewish writer." He had always been interested in writing "for all men," he said. *The Natural* had successfully evoked the most American of myths as expressed by our national sport. But the novel had not, in doing this, cast a single character as a Jew—a false start for Malamud whose Jewishness was the ground water of his imagination. His second novel, *The Assistant*, now thought to be his best, taps directly into his own early memories. It has a hero who resembles Malamud's father, an immigrant grocer struggling to survive in New York during the Depression. And the short stories he had begun writing derive from early observation of the Jews without money he had known in his boyhood, especially small shopkeepers or craftsmen who lived isolated lives amidst the alien corn, bereft of a lost *shtetl* world. Critics compared Malamud to Chekhov, Hemingway, and Joyce as well as to Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Yiddish teacher from whom he had learned how to make a tale both vernacular and universal. "The Magic Barrel" is the title story of his first collection of tales, a National Book Award winner.

It portrays the anguish of Leo Finkle, a poor Rabbinical student who goes to a marriage broker to find a bride and falls in love, perhaps by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

broker's contrivance, with the broker's prostitute daughter. But, in "The First Seven Years," there is also Feld, the shoemaker whose aspirations for his daughter are balked by love she arouses in his unpromising apprentice. In "The Mourners," Kessler, formerly an egg candler, living on social security in his dirty flat, provokes repugnance and sadism in the tenement janitor and the building owner. In "Take Pity," Rosen, a coffee salesman, falls in love with a grocer's impoverished widow who refuses his charity. In "The Bill," Schlegel, a janitor, runs up a bill he cannot pay at a delicatessen being squeezed to death by a new self-service. Tommy Castrelli (who might just as well be Jewish) watches, with silent pity, as a ten-year-old steals candy in his store in "The Prison." Malamud had received a Rockefeller grant (sponsored by *PR*) and went to Italy for a year, and some of the *Magic Barrel* stories reflect the foreign scene the writer observed as sharply as he had seen the streets of New York. But, in an odd, Henry Jamesian way, these are representations of a transplanted state of mind. "The Last Mohican" is the first of Malamud's stories about a New York *déraciné* in Rome, the failed painter Fidelman, pursued by a *schnorrer* he cannot shake off and must embrace.

These stories are not just genre sketches despite their representation of the comic/pathetic circumstances and pretzel-bent English of the characters. There is a mysterious, visionary element in them, a flirting with the fabulous that heightens their meaning as morality tales. In "Angel Levine" the tailor, Manischevitz, oppressed by reverses, is visited by a black man whom he first takes for a down-at-the-heels social worker but who identifies himself as a wingless Jewish angel sent to succor him. "So if God sends me an angel, why a black?" asks Manischevitz. Only after his troubles multiply beyond bearing does he seek out Levine. He finds him drunk and in bad company at a disreputable Harlem honky-tonk. An authentic angel, this person? "Manischevitz was recalling scenes of his youth as a wheel in his mind whirred: believe, do not, yes, no, yes, no." He decides: "I think you are an angel from God." After this, Levine sprouts wings. When Manischevitz finds his wife recovered from deathly sickness, he tells her, "A wonderful thing, Fanny. Believe me, there are Jews everywhere." A religious story? Yes. No. A story about racial division and its repair. About redemptive trust and the recovery of community.

Perhaps the supernatural that surfaces in some of the stories derives from Rabbinical tradition; religious mythology and moral teaching is often implied where the fabulous suggests another, sacred world. We wonder where we are as we begin "Take Pity":

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Davidov, the census-taker, opened the door without knocking, limped into the room, and sat wearily down. Out came his notebook and he was on the job. Rosen, the ex-coffee salesman, waited, eyes despairing, sat motionless cross-legged, on his cot. The square, clean, but cold room, lit by a dim globe, was sparsely furnished: the cot, a folding chair, small table, old, unpainted chests—no closets but who needed them?—and a small sink with a rough piece of green, institutional soap on its holder—you could smell it across the room.

Is this a hospital room? A prison cell? We are in hell or purgatory, though those places are not referred to. The "census-taker" seems another wingless angel, making up the record for Rosen who had finally killed himself so that he might leave his property to the widow who sent back all his letters. "Let her say now no."

Malamud's stories—like Joyce's—climax in secular epiphanies. What, after all, is magic about the matchmaker's barrel full of the pictures of impossible brides? That it reveals to young rabbi Finkel what he truly is—someone "unloved and loveless" who "has come to God not because [he] loved him but because [he] did not," while the same barrel contains, also, the bride he can love, the woman who will redeem him, though she is the most impossible. After Kessler, the isolated ex-egg-candler, has been thrust out of his miserable lodging but has broken in again, he cries out to his landlord, "What did I do to you? Who throws out of his house a man he lived there ten years and pays every month on time his rent?" His suffering makes him recall the reason for his loneliness—how years before he had abandoned his family—and he rocks, moaning, on the floor. And Gruber, the landlord, his enemy, suddenly joins him in sitting *shiva*. "With a cry of shame he pulled the sheet off Kessler's bed and wrapping it around himself sank to the floor and became a mourner." It is the same discovery of redemptive mutuality that makes the climax in *The Assistant* between the grocer Morris Bober and Frank Alpine, the small-time crook and drifter who works for him: "'What do you suffer for, Morris?' said Frank. 'I suffer for you,' Morris said calmly. 'What do you mean?' asked Frank. 'I mean you suffer for me.'" Their illumination is as much Christian as Jewish, resembling what occurs in certain stories by Flannery O'Connor deriving ultimately from her Catholicism (O'Connor, when she read *The Magic Barrel*, exclaimed to a friend, "I have discovered a short-story writer who is better than any of them, including myself"). His stories give such universality to the theme of Jewish loneliness that they justify Malamud's own remark, "All men are Jews."

Malamud would write six more novels after *The Assistant*, most notably *The Fixer* (which won a Pulitzer Prize) about a Jewish handyman accused

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a ritual murder in Czarist Russia, and *The Tenants*, a darker vision of black-Jewish relations than had been expressed sixteen years before in "Angel Levine." But it is the shorter fiction, written throughout his life that distinguishes him as a modern master. Following *The Magic Barrel*, there were three more collections of stories he continued to publish in *PR, Commentary, the Atlantic, the New Yorker*, and other magazines. Some of these have been further reprinted many times but it is only now that we have all fifty-five in one volume. In *The Complete Stories* we can even read the earliest, which appeared in college magazines in the forties—realistic Depression stories typified by "The Grocery Store" which depicts the despair of the defeated shopkeeper: "Eighteen hours a day, from 6 a.m. to midnight, sitting in the back of a grocery store waiting for a customer to come in for a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread and maybe—*maybe* a can of sardines." Still missing is the shimmer of sacred mystery that lights up the literal in *The Magic Barrel*. But once that breakthrough is achieved it continues to illuminate the best of his later work. In "Idiot's First" (1961) Mendel, who is dying, is resolved to provide for his retarded son by sending him to an uncle in California. He hasn't the price of the rail ticket even after he pawns his watch, and he is turned off by a rich man who tells him, "Private contributions I don't make—only to institutions....Take him to an institution." A sympathetic rabbi hands him his own coat to pawn, however, and there is just time enough to buy the ticket. Yet in the station the platform gate is closed, the train is pulling out, and "Ginzburg" stands guard: "Favors you had enough already. For you the train is gone. You shoulda been dead already at midnight." Mendel cries to the angel of death (for who else can this "Ginzburg" be?), "You bastard, don't you understand what it means human?"—and the gate opens.

In *The Complete Stories* one can read again, with delight, "The Jewbird" (1963), Malamud's fable about a ragged crow who flies, uninvited, through the window of the apartment of a frozen-food salesman. *"Gewalt,* a pogrom," the bird says as Harry Cohen whacks at it. The refugee hangs around till it wears out its welcome, though it has entertained the family with its jokes, tutored the schoolboy son, and asked only for a bit of herring on a crust from time to time. Its reluctant host, a Jewish "anti-semeet," begins to persecute the jewbird, exiles it to the wintry balcony of the apartment, introduces a murderous cat, and, finally, throws the bird to its death in the street. "The Silver Crown" (1972) is a story about an ambiguously supernatural miracle. Albert Gans pays a faith healer to save his dying father by making him a magical healing crown. A high school biology teacher, an educated skeptic, he has no reason except desperation to believe in the cure promised by the shifty, shabby old rabbi. He suspects he is being conned and finally panics and wants his money back. "Think

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of your father who loves you," the old man says—making Albert suddenly retort, in a burst of unforeseeable truth-telling, "He hates me the son of a bitch, I hope he croaks." *This confession* is the miracle, whether the death of Albert's father is inevitable or caused by Albert's curse.

Malamud died in 1986, but Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Norman Mailer, the three other horsemen of the Jewish-American literary apocalypse that galloped into view in the 1950s and 60s, are still clattering down the highway. This past season saw new books by all three—a major novel by Roth, a wise novella by Bellow, and a characteristic illustration of his rash self-confidence by Mailer, to be discussed below. In addition, there is a new book of fiction from Cynthia Ozick, her first in a decade. She has always been aware of the dominating presence of her male rivals. When she heard Malamud read "The Silver Crown" at the 92nd Street Y in New York, the effect, Ozick says, was "so electrifying that I wished with all my heart it was mine"—an event she reproduces in a story called "Usurpation (Other People's Stories)." But Ozick's exploitation of Jewish humor and mysticism is not identical with Malamud's—she is more complexly and self-consciously intellectual, for one thing. Except for Bellow—the most intellectual of them all—she is more constantly embroiled in the play and contest of ideas than her male counterparts, and it is not surprising that she has become famous as an essayist with a quirky, swaggery, brightly readable way of dealing with difficult questions. But her fiction expresses her thought on a deeper level.

Where she differs most from Mailer, Roth, Malamud, and even Bellow has been in her view of Jewish identity. She does not believe that "all men are Jews." She dedicated her novel *The Messiah of Stockholm* to Roth because he had drawn her attention to the novel's historical subject, the Polish-Jewish writer Bruno Schulz, and perhaps because her plot was suggested by Roth's "Prague Orgy." Yet her use of their shared heritage—her unique literary tone—is different from his. To Roth's disclaimer—not unlike Malamud's—"I am not a Jewish writer; I am a writer who is a Jew," she responded in 1970, "Roth's words do not represent a credo; they speak for a doom." More than these fellow writers, Ozick herself has wanted to hang fast to an unassimilated Jewish identity, to use the structures of traditional Hebrew exegesis in viewing the world. There is a resemblance between her early story, "Bloodshed," and Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic," in which an orthodox believer is contrasted with a modern, assimilated American Jew, but Roth is more interested in the conflicted Jewish-American, Ozick in the strength of her orthodox refugee from the Nazi camps. Yet she is not all-of-a-piece. The problem of achieving Jewish self-definition obsesses her, and it sometimes seems that she despairs of a solution. Who can forget Isaac Kornfeld in "The Pagan Rabbi," the pious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scholar who becomes a passionate pantheist, who struggles for union with nature and couples with the dryad of the tree on which he finally hangs himself? But does Ozick see herself in him? Or in the story's skeptic narrator who abandons his religious vocation, goes into his uncle's fur business, and marries an American Protestant "puritan" from whom he is soon divorced—while Rabbi Kornfeld marries a holocaust survivor? Or in this wife of the transcendental apostate who hides her beautiful hair in the orthodox married woman's wig and bears seven daughters? Or is Ozick herself present in none of these but rather in the ironic, rationalist mind that molds the narrative? "The Shawl," published with its sequel "Rosa" in 1989, confronts the question of Jewish identity through that most inexpressible of subjects, the holocaust experience—the historic trauma which haunts all writing about Jewry in our time. Like Bellow—"whose whole fiction is a wrestling with the Angel of Theodicy," as she has said—Ozick seeks to comprehend the "Creator who admitted Auschwitz into His creation"—and this darkest of puzzles remains unilluminated. Despair concerning ultimate meaning—despite a superficial lightheartedness—seems represented in the five stories joined together in *The Puttermesser Papers.*

They do not compose a novel although the separate stories give portions (not always logically connected) of one Ruth Puttermesser's history from youth to death and the afterlife. The book is uneasily taken as a whole. Ozick once criticized Roth's *The Counterlife* because its characters seemed to her "so wilily infiltrated by postmodern inconstancy that they keep revising their speeches and their fates: you can't trust them to stay dead." But *The Puttermesser Papers* is as postmodern and skeptical as anything Roth has written. One of its best moments is a scene between young Ruth and her great-uncle Zindel who has been giving her Hebrew lessons and acts as an ancestral reference until the narrator breaks off to say he died before she was born: "Stop, stop! Puttermesser's biographer, stop! . . . Though it is true that biographies are invented, not recorded, you invent too much!" The authorial voice engages the formulas of conventional storytelling and mocks them, as when she pauses to say,

> Now if this were an optimistic portrait, exactly here is where Puttermesser's emotional life would begin to grind itself into evidence. Her biography would proceed romantically, the rich young Commissioner of the Department of Receipts and Disbursements would fall in love with her. She would convert him to intelligence and the cause of Soviet Jewry. He would abandon boating and the pursuit of bluebloods. Puttermesser would end her work history and move on to a bower in a fine suburb. This is not to be.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Puttermesser Papers is a dancing combination of straight and "magic" realism, of actual and pretended authorial self-reference and self-consciousness. But witty and astonishing as they are, the "papers" seem to compose a grim allegory signifying the defeat of various idealisms which Ozick herself may once have cherished. It is not an "optimistic portrait." The character with the ridiculous name of Butter Knife is a defeated pilgrim. In the most astonishing of the stories, "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," Puttermesser makes a golem, like the famous rabbis of old, but she is herself a kind of golem created by her own maker to work temporary wonders until she is compelled to subside into dust.

Puttermesser, who is and looks Jewish—she would not be invited to pose for a Breck Shampoo ad, she reminds us—begins by reading the hardest books, getting the best marks in law school, going to work in a prestigious WASP law firm. Soon she discovers that she will never rise above a drudge's status in the back office. Having better faith in the fairness of a democracy's civil service, she enters the City's Department of Receipts and Disbursements and labors in its Kafka-like warren of bureaucratic complications and futilities. Here, too, she fails to progress and is arbitrarily demoted. In addition, she is jilted by her married lover because she reads in bed. But as "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" relates, she finds a naked girl in her apartment one day, a creature she discovers to be a golem she has unknowingly created. With the golem's help, she is elected Mayor and transforms New York. "Gangs of youths have invaded the subway yards at night and washed the cars clean. . . .In their high secret pride, the slums undo themeslves. . . .The ex-pimps are learning computer skills." But this paradise on earth must soon decay. The golem's own lust and ambition get out of hand—and Puttermesser destroys her.

Later stories return to the realism of the opening and reinforce the pessimism of the Xanthippe story as one or another of Puttermesser's beliefs is shown to be fallacious. Middle-aged Puttermesser does not seem to have ever made a golem but merely retired as a municipal civil servant. She falls in love with a painter who copies works in the Metropolitan Museum, and she tries to enact with him the union of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes. But her lover replicates instead the role of John Cross, to whom Eliot was briefly married after Lewes' death and who attempted suicide. The moral in this odd affair may concern the dangers of imitation, whether of art or others' actuality, or merely, perhaps, the likely failure of idealized relationships. A more successful, very funny story casts into the dustbin Puttermesser's sentimental view of the Soviet Jew. She takes in a refugee Russian cousin who turns out to be neither pathetic victim nor freedom fighter but a savvy beauty who makes money selling Lenin medals and other souvenirs of the land from which she has fled and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to which she returns thousands of dollars richer. Finally, Puttermesser meets her death, like a true New Yorker raped and murdered by a ski-masked burglar. Fantasy returns to the narrative as we follow our heroine to Heaven, where "the lost, the missing, the wished for," are recovered—the love of a man who had rejected her when she was nineteen and the birth of a child she never had. But like the golem-created paradisal New York or the perfect marriage of the two Georges or the myth of the idealistic revolutionary, paradise crumbles: "The secret meaning of Paradise is that it too is hell." On this note of final disillusion a poetic and bizarre book closes.

In 1970, Ozick wrote that Norman Mailer was, to her mind, "a tragic American exemplar of wasted powers and large-scale denial [who,] born in the *shtetl* called Brooklyn, so strenuously and with little irony turns himself into Esau." She predicted, "One day he will become a small Gentile footnote, about the size of H. L. Mencken. And the House of Israel will know him no more. And he will have had his three decades of Diaspora flattery. Esau gains the short run but the long run belongs to Jacob." I would guess that her view has not altered and that Mailer's latest work seems to her a fulfillment of her prediction. This, his thirtieth book, may be the ultimate expression of what Ozick might consider his role as Esau—the rewriting of the canonical life of the founder of Christianity. It is, in any case, no major addition to a reputation that continues to be that of one of our most talented writers whose best achievements have often fallen short of complete success while proving his abundant versatility, his interest in the whole of life, his readiness to take risks and to change.

The Gospel According to the Son is either a novel or a novelized "true life," the latest in the succession of free-form Mailer biographies of diverse remarkable persons—Marilyn Monroe, Lee Harvey Oswald, Gary Gilmore, Pablo Picasso. The subject has appealed to novelists ever since David Friedrich Strauss (whose *Das Leben Jesu* was first translated into English by George Eliot) first offered the image of a real man who lived an extraordinary life without necessarily performing the miracles attributed to him. Ernest Renan's historical *Vie de Jesus* (1863) became as popular as the novels that began to be written in which Jesus is at least a minor character (as in George Moore's *The Brook Kerith*) and sometimes the central one. Even Dickens wrote a *Life of Our Lord* for children. Among recent novelistic recapitulations and variations of the story intensely familiar to millions have been books written by Nikos Kazantzakis, Anthony Burgess, Guy Davenport and many others; last year Walter Wangerin's 850-page *The Book of God: the Bible as a Novel* was published, as was novelist Reynolds Price's *Three Gospels*. What seems strange in Mailer's case is the fact that this famous nose-thumber so driven in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

past by the desire to subvert the conventional produces a bland retelling that fleshes out the Bible story in a way that might easily be exceeded for inventive extrapolation by an inspired gospel preacher eager to "bring home" the story to his auditors. Mailer adds no new episodes, introduces no startling challenge to traditional doctrinal interpretations. Where he might have taken advantage of modern speculation that revises the Gospels he doesn't do so, unlike such recent controversial polemicists as A. N. Wilson (*Jesus: A Life*) or John Dominic Crossan (*Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*), who argue, for example, that Jesus was the victim of the Roman state rather than of his fellow Jews.

Mailer's Jesus presents himself as undertaking, somewhat querulously, to set the record straight, but hardly changes much. "While I would not say that Mark's gospel is false, it has much exaggeration. And I would offer less for Matthew, and for Luke and John, who gave me words I never uttered." Of the Sermon on the Mount, Mailer's Jesus says,

> Later those who became my scribes, and most notably Matthew, in his gospel, would speak of my Sermon on the Mount. They had me saying all manner of things, and some were the opposite of others. Matthew put so many sayings together, indeed, that he might as well have had me not ceasing to speak for a day and a night, and speaking out of two mouths that did not listen to each other.

That Mailer makes Jesus commit the solecism of referring to listening mouths may not be important. But his Jesus immediately refutes himself by recapitulating, in their usual order, both Matthew's Beatitudes and most of Jesus's subsequent remarks about those who are the "light of the world," about turning the other cheek and loving one's enemy, about the lilies of the field, and other things, with the inclusion of the Lord's Prayer. Mailer does exclude a good deal, including some of the best of the parables, perhaps because they are not so much events in the narrative of Jesus's life as stories within the story, or perhaps because they are too ambiguous for his matter-of-fact Son. His alterations in the direction of a suppositional verity include occasional naturalistic explanation; one miracle, the miracle of the loaves and fishes, is explained as simply having been a matter of cutting up the original small amounts of each into tiny pieces and distributing these in the place of full portions. But there is no consistent effort in this direction; Mailer's Jesus raises the dead, walks on water, and does most of his reputed miracles without strain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mailer's chief innovation has been to allow his Jesus to tell his own story. One possible precedent is *The Life of God (as Told by Himself)* by Franco Ferrucci, which appeared in Italian ten years ago but was published in English translation last year. Taking the whole stretch of history from Genesis through the times of Jesus and beyond to the brink of the second millennium, the autobiography of Ferrucci's God is a witty satire on the life of Man. His bemused Creator and Ruler who absentmindedly starts everything and witnesses history unroll with distracted interest and often ineffectual efforts at control is more like one of the Greek or Roman Olympians than the God of either the Old or the New Testaments. Mailer, however, focuses without satiric intent on the elusive individuality reverently portrayed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and attempts to supplement the gospels by a "told by himself" apologia. Needless to say, the materials for such an inside view of Jesus have never been available. Those first apostolic biographers had not witnessed the events they describe nor even known the chief actor directly. For them, even more than for those who might have known him better, Jesus's private thought remained hidden—and this unreachableness has probably been an assist to religious response. The stark yet immensely pregnant character of Jesus's utterances is very different from the Gospel authors's own prose, giving some ground to the idea that Jesus' words made so strong an impression on hearers that legend preserved them accurately, but we are given no more than those words. The selfhood of the Man-God is, after all, pretty unimaginable. Mailer avoids the problem of portraying Divinity conscious of itself in the child and young carpenter's apprentice by simply having Jesus forget—or suppress—the truth concerning his birth which he had been told at twelve. At thirty, with the help of John the Baptist, the knowledge arrives, and with it some wonderworking skills, but does not seem to change him much or give him a special sense of connection with God's purposes. The flat, patiently explanatory first-person voice of Mailer's autobiographer irons out mystery.

Like many writers before him, Mailer really does better with fallen than unfallen nature and the Devil briefly has a lively presence in the scenes of Jesus's temptation, in which Mailer allows himself a little inventive freedom. Judas is also interesting—and one wishes Mailer had done more with him; he is portrayed as a sort of sixties radical, a dropout rich man's son who follows Jesus not because he believes in his promise of heavenly salvation but because his message makes the poor think they are as good as others—and so forwards the earthly Revolution. But holiness becomes human in Mailer's account only by becoming too ordinary. Jesus's relations with Mary and with God the Father are explained by a somewhat pat Maileresque psychologizing. The Virgin Mother is a stupid woman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who wants to keep her son in rompers. It seems that "if Mary was modest she was also vain. . . .She did not enjoy what she did not understand." She tries to make her son afraid of the Romans when he is young and later she is obsequious to wealthy Jews. She always thinks she knows what is good for him better than he does himself, and she becomes something of a nuisance. So, he rejects her with his "Who is my mother?" God the Father is also a banal disappointment: "My Father...does not often speak to me. Nonetheless I honor him. He sends forth as much love as he can offer, but his love is not without limit." Jesus cries out vainly for paternal help in his last moments, but afterwards the old oedipal anger subsides in a cozy reconciliation: "My Father was only doing what He could do. Even as I had done what I could do. So He was truly my Father. Like all Fathers He had many sore troubles...and some had little to do with his son." Jesus and his relatives are, alas, duller, in Mailer's account, than one had supposed them.

Finally, what does it mean to live in modern times on the margin of a culture that calls itself Christian? David Mamet, no less than these seniors, continues to ponder the question by writing a novel about a true American episode, the 1915 trial of a Jew accused of raping and murdering a Southern girl. He is Leo Frank, factory manager of the National Pencil factory in Atlanta, Georgia. The Pulitzer prize-winning playwright gives dramatic form to the forgotten events—his adroitly-told story progresses by means of dialogue—but what is heard and what is thought interlace in a Mametian way, in abrupt, half-uttered fragments in which actual speaking presence alternates with recollection and reflection. At one moment we seem to overhear the discussions of a small cluster of Jews established for two generations in the midst of a community from which the Ku Klux Klan has begun to hound and harry them. Yet we are also inside the head of Frank, who is often arguing with himself during a succession of moments recalled in brilliant kaleidoscope during his trial. Some of these moments seem culled at random from the trivial details of his former routines at home or in his office; they are vivid, immediate, and without obvious significance, the ordered sensations of a man who seems to find his place in an ordered world, the life of the well-adjusted assimilated stranger. Yet they vibrate with a sense of doom as Mamet exhibits the racist world that crunches Frank in its jaws. This is the society that oppresses and segregates its outcasts within the gates, its Blacks, yet uses a Black man as a false witness to accuse the Jew who is called "the Nigger to the nth degree." Frank's Jewishness is grounds for suggesting sexual perversity; factory girls testify that he is a lecher: "He came up to me one Saady, and we were going out, by the second floor, and he ast me to stay."

We are with Frank during the months when he is waiting for execution, goes through forty-seven Trollope novels in the prison library, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

learns to read Hebrew to study the Torah. He ponders, "If, in an atmosphere of possibility, in a land of plenty, we thrived; if, free of persecution, one has managed, two have managed, and thrived, was this not the principle upon which the country was built?" But he also decides that it is necessary "to serve God"—though he is not sure what that means. With the Rabbi who visits him he ponders such things as the return twice but not a third time of Noah's dove. "Could it not be that the dove had wanted to remain on the ark? That when Noah expelled it, it returned hurt, hurt and fearful; that when he sent it out again, it returned with this evidence: the land exists, but it is bitter. . . .Then, when Noah repulsed it again, it went forth, having been given no choice but to make its way in that bitter world." Again and again, he remembers the Confederate Memorial Day when his ordeal begins, the Saturday that begins so calmly when he happens to knock over the salt cellar at his breakfast table and senses a portent. Now the time comes when his throat is cut by an assassin inside the prison—yet he is still alive, recovers, is taken by force from the hospital by a lynch mob, castrated, and hanged. It is the stark end of Mamet's story, but not the end of social memory. A photo taken of his hanging body "sold for many years in stores throughout the South." Mamet's combination of harrowing historic recall and a mystic self-questioning of Jewish tribal destiny is ambitious in its aim and moving in its results.

JAMES LAUGHLIN

1914–1997

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LEONARD KRIEGEL

Fathers, Sons, Brothers, Strangers: A Meditation On Courage, Memory, And Belonging

> I picture the equality which would then arise between us—and which you would be able to understand better than any other form of equality—as so beautiful because then I could be a free, grateful, guiltless, upright son, and you could be an untroubled, untyrannical, sympathetic, contented father. But to this end everything that ever happened would have to be undone, that is, we ourselves should have to be canceled out.
>
> Kafka, *Letter To His Father*

Self-portraits are rarely portraits of the self alone. For me, it is my younger brother in whose presence my own mask cracks. In a curiously intimate sense, my brother's life is where my own truest self stands revealed. And if Abe's life is not where I necessarily choose to begin, it is where I so frequently seem to end. Reflections upon the past's meaning, speculation about future possibilities—in the quest to frame a usable self, to see one's brother is to see oneself anew, alone in the nerve-jangling fun house of imagination's eye.

It is there, then, in my own raucous imagination, that I hear my brother, his sense of injustice clenched as tightly as a fist, pounding me until I feel like a cornered boxer with no place to hide. Through the telephone wires, the sullen imperatives of Abe's accusations demand recognition. He wants an older brother ready to acknowledge that *his* life was forced to accommodate itself to *my* illness. But what is it I can tell him that he does not already know? What defense shall I offer for the course illness took? Do I say to him, "I know that disease is a sharing. Even between brothers? Especially between brothers." Do I announce that I realize a man should be able to chart both illness and courage on an emotional graph that traces their effects upon each other? I know that we are not speaking of abstrac-

Editor's Note: Reprinted from *Flying Solo: Reimagining Manhood, Courage, and Loss* by Leonard Kriegel. Copyright © 1998 by Leonard Kriegel. By permission of Beacon Press.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions here, that we are speaking of what occurred between us, between two men connected by blood and a shared past. Maybe I should respond to his anger with anger of my own and demand that he check his facts, shout him down by reminding him that it was, after all, I who lost the use of my legs. I suppose that I could even give in to banality and apologize—simply say, "I'm sorry!" and put an end to it. Only all the weight of the evidence is on his side. Polio crippled me. But he paid so much of the price I should have paid.

And so I find myself listening to Abe's accusations as if I were caught up bodily in one of those black and white newsreels from the 1930s, where the film is so grainy that the tanks on screen look like wound-up toys rolling across patched and peeled terrain and death itself seems curiously mesmerizing. An end to questions offers the stamp of finality. Yet my brother's rage, as I imagine it, continues to hammer away at me. I wish I could attend to each shading of tone, to give each individual word, each angry syllable, a proper response. Only as Abe speaks of how much my being crippled cost his childhood and adolescence, I retreat into my own burgeoning resentment. His words rain down on me, yet all I can envision is a Chaplinesque newsreel in which Mussolini sneers with contempt for Ethiopia, hands on fat hips as he preens for the newsreel cameras. Snapping his fingers while strutting his stuff on the balcony, *Il Duce*'s actor's courage offers itself to the frenzied Roman mob in the square below. How silly an image for a man trying to measure the truth of a brother's imaginary accusations. Only it can't be helped. The mind forces its images on brothers, however paranoid they may seem, as it did on Cain when he wondered why Abel's sacrifice, not his, had been found worthy in God's sight.

But I can't avoid my brother's accusations with remembered images of *Il Duce* on his balcony. The truth is that even in our imaginary confrontations, all I can do is to listen to my brother in silence—proof enough that deep down I believe he is right. Even if I were successful in hiding within that grainy old newsreel, I would not be able to change how right he is. Men are linked to each other, as both Christians and Marxists like to claim. And if that is so, then to acknowledge a blood brother's rage is to acknowledge the most powerful of links. Disease *is* a sharing. My brother paid a terrible price for the polio that crippled me—an even higher price, I often think, than the price I myself paid. Guilt is the anvil on which our links were forged, just as it is the syllogism on which we two have constructed the logic of our current relationship. I am not part of that 1930s Roman mob, nor am I an Ethiopian warrior about to hurl a spear against the steel skin of an Italian tank. I am a brother's brother, another American adrift in the 1990s, painfully aware of that time when he was my keeper. Neither of us can ever forget that. Pulled into a world where drama was played out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not in public squares but in the dim confines of a Bronx apartment, I listen to my brother unfold his version of my life.

And if my life turned out to be his legacy, too, then why shouldn't he? In certain respects, the virus that took my legs took things of greater value from him—his childhood and adolescence. So that even the mind's comedy, where *Il Duce* berates the world from a balcony in Rome, is overwhelmed by the wrench of pain I hear in my brother's voice. Not our laughter at how absurd history's pomp and circumstance may be but our fear of the intimate legacies pain imposes on our relationship—that is what binds us to each other, as those same legacies bind us to the subtleties of a past whose love and bitterness we share. What I detect in my brother's voice, as it burns through the wires from Memphis, are the memories he earned. For men earn the memories that sustain them, just as they earn the roles they play—father, brother, husband, son. In imagination, I am condemned to listen to my brother's words as they sting my flesh like pellets from a B-B-gun. I must look at the self my brother sees, in that landscape which, even as it grows distant, defines the man each of us has become. Only this time my search is not for what of myself I see back there. It is for what of my brother was left back there with me.

Both Abe and I have long since departed from the streets that framed our coming-of-age. After completing his graduate work in history at Duke, my brother settled in Memphis, capitol of that Deep South which was the *Gehenna* of our New York City childhoods. I traveled a much shorter road—at least as far as distance is concerned—to Manhattan, that spot on the map both Abe and I were conditioned to think of as "the real city." Yet the past that binds is also the past that separates. The question is not merely one of geography but of whose version of reality we can accept. Abe and I are not only brothers, we are also men trying to understand what formed us—each of us husband, father, taxpayer, citizen. And each a son to that same dead father. As I listen to his voice fill with accusation, it occurs to me that my brother, like me, is middle-aged. The thought is so sudden that it shocks me, disintegrating time. I don't understand why that is so. Not really. I have no difficulty in accepting that my sons and my wife and I myself are growing older. But when I see Abe on his trips back to New York or on my own forays to Memphis, I am stunned to see that he has a beard now, gray and bushy, and that his face has taken on the contours of our father's face.

Like me, my brother is one of memory's children. Even in my imagination, he measures the rage in his heart by everything that lies unresolved in the past we mutually claim. Only it is his to interpret, he now insists, even more than it is mine. It is his past that we must decipher. When he speaks of his daughters, my nieces, or asks after his nephews, my sons, his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

focus is on the life we shared. In the depths of his own imagination, he believes that I still threaten the integrity of his past, that I may yet steal it from him as I stole his childhood and adolescence. That is the way brothers sometimes face each other, the past a possession to be fought over and struggled for, even as it anchors memory and accusation. Yet that is not what the past was supposed to do. The past was supposed to harbor our triumphs and tragedies, to shape what we would make of ourselves through a personal geography in which 206th Street's small apartment buildings and two-family "private" houses would stand to the end of consciousness like traps on a Monopoly board. Over there, an empty lot planted as a Victory Garden during the early days of the war; across Rochambeau Avenue, the three schoolyards of P. S. 80 in which we played ball; up the avenue and around the corner, a cellar with lamps and an old couch that had been made into a "clubhouse," a dungeon to which one might bring a girl and one's hungers. Memory invites each of us to a still-passionate romance with all those urban places of the heart that can feed a man belief in his own value.

Only what anchors my brother and me even more firmly to our past is that father whom we each recall so vividly, that man whose hold on us, twenty years after his death, still reinforces the awkward simplicity of all that we seek. For the dead father belongs to both my brother and me. He is Abe's father and mine, *our* father. And as his sons, we are even closer than we are as brothers, a truth we battle over as we speak across the thousand miles that separate us. What is it we speak of? About facing that narrow coil of memory where sons struggle with the desire to rearrange their lives and defy the lessons of time. Abe and I both recognize that truth between us must be limited to what each of us can make his peace with. There are immigrant fathers, there are American sons—and there are the memories of those immigrant fathers that the American sons are condemned to live with. Scores of immigrant fathers who brought into this world scores of American sons. Yet neither of us can take solace from the knowledge that the condition is not ours alone.

We have our memories of the cost of the love that dead father commanded. But those memories are not the way it was supposed to be. In the movies, pipe-smoking Judge Hardy was our image of an American father. Of course, we knew that the judge would have been out of place in so cramped an apartment as ours. In a New York tenement, his gentle advice would have been much more difficult to follow. And neither Abe nor I could ever compete with the American charm of a Mickey Rooney. We knew that, too. Finally, we knew that an immigrant father did not give advice to his American sons. Our job was to interpret the nation's ways for him. As for love, he had no choice but to assume that we would give to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him what he so willingly gave to his own father in Galicia. That was a father's due in the Old Country, where even dead he commanded the love of a living son because such love was considered as natural as the phases of the moon. Here, we were the American sons—to the nation, not the man, born and bred.

In the tiny entrance foyer to a one-bedroom apartment, our father's father stares down at us from the wall. In the photograph, he looks much bigger than our father, his son, the walnut frame bordered by the cracked plaster of the foyer wall. A square skullcap sits on his head. He has a broad forehead, while the touch of a frown testifies to his high seriousness. I cannot think of him as my grandfather, yet he occupies a permanent place in my mind—not so much man as a mysterious presence working God's purpose. Or so our father, his son, insists. Only Abe and I see not God's purpose but a man able to command, a face capable of ordering around our father, who himself commands only my brother and me. Americans are supposed to think of themselves as born to command. Does that explain why each of our father's sons is secretly ashamed of the love he feels for him?

That is what I want to ask Abe. Only I am afraid of what his answer may be. His brooding sense of injustice sweeps past everything in its path, like a cyclone of retribution smashing against the reality we share, until, a bursting dam of pain and emotion, he himself is flooded by those moments with our father when he was forced to take my place. A core of resentment against which I offer only my rising irritation. The past a giant vacuum cleaner sucking each of us into its center. We are grown men, I want to say to my brother. Such memories are too trivial to serve as anchor for a man's life. Yet I listen and nod when the justice of an accusation hits home, as if my brother were sitting across from me at the kitchen table rather than speaking across those imaginary telephone wires from Memphis. It was he, Abe reminds me, the younger son by four years, who *davened* with our father in the synagogue at Yom Kippur. Time closes on the approach of evening like God's own bony fingers. "Me!" he insists. "Doing your job." But it isn't a question of which of us prayed with our father, I want to protest. I was "sick," and so he was expected to be both older *and* younger son. Only my brother still remembers, as if it were yesterday, the boundaries of obligation during the Days of Awe. His obligation, not mine.

Let him begin with beginnings, even if my defense proves inadequate. The Days of Awe were, for both my brother and me, not so much between God and man as between father and sons. It is not reality that proves disconcerting when prayer is remembered but the expectations to which prayer gives voice. What was it our dead father expected his sons to atone for when our need was not for food to break the fast nor for the approval

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of our father's God but for him, the dead father himself, to tell us once again that we were good sons, American sons? His need for the comfort of belief was what we wanted to satisfy even if we remained beyond belief's comfort. For his belief threatened to condemn us to that dark Europe of his superstitious longing. The legacy of American sons was to extol the immigrant father, and then refuse to follow him.

Yet if I did not follow him, I also never adequately praised that man who was not able to seize the America his sons hungered for. Twenty years after his death, how can I speak of the courage of a fear-filled immigrant without sentimentality? How do I explain that he blessed America as savior even as he cursed his inability to understand it? Did either Abe or I have any choice but to reject our father—with love, yes, but reject him nonetheless? He never understood the country that filled our liberated imaginations, and we felt nothing but contempt for his Europe. Not for us Emma Lazarus' passionate plea. If we wanted Europe's tired and poor or those huddled masses yearning to breathe free, all we had to do was take a good look in the mirror.

Mirror, mirror, on the wall
Who's the greatest success of them all?

Not our immigrant father. Sons want more than a sigh of resignation in the bleak night, or a shrug of the shoulders to indicate that the father accepts his fate. What our father could not understand was that the laconic acceptance his sons found in Jimmy Stewart's Saturday afternoon movie voice echoed immensities of space that could never be filled, a majestic American emptiness so far beyond the Yiddish inflections of our father's *shtetl* past that it made us wince at the thought of what he must sound like to the Irish on our block who had assumed the title (if not the prerogatives) of the neighborhood's "real" Americans. We did not want the puffiness and raw nerves of Galicia. We did not need the sweaty smell of bodies laboring or the cloaked consciousness by which pogroms were dated. We had no use for the endless recitations of death and destruction, the anniversaries in which catastrophe was hysterically pledged to memory. What we wanted were fireworks on the Fourth of July, eating hot dogs at Coney Island, belly whopping on the sled we shared on Mosholu Parkway's hills in winter's snow. The places we hungered for were incalculably beyond his unquestioning loyalty to a God who commanded that the heart of the ghetto beat to the rhythm of old fears. America asked of its sons only the courage to change. Of its immigrant fathers, it asked nothing.

He possessed a different kind of courage from what America wanted—quiet, weathered, dull. There was little in Fred Kriegel that one could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

speak of as daring. Even his stories about the Old Country downplayed man in favor of that tough God who seemed to challenge his endurance like a Parris Island drill sergeant practicing his profession. At twelve, he had been seized by Cossacks and forced into a work gang. He had wandered the steppes of Russia for almost a year and a half, boy-turned-man before his time who knew that he had to keep a wary eye on the Cossacks mounted on horses alongside of him, whips at the ready as they sat high in the saddle. That time of forced labor haunts my brother and me with the same kind of isolation we have read about in frontier captivity narratives, where children must make their way through forested miles of haunted landscape. For our father, just one more test of endurance that his God had set in his path. "Had your Judaism been stronger," Kafka writes to his own father, "your example would have been more compelling." Kafka's father was no more like our father than his *Amerika* was like our America. Had Abe or I offered advice to our father, we would have urged him to pay less heed to his God and more to the American imperatives his sons worshiped.

And yet, even with that burden of Europe, he made the journey away from home and into manhood. Only it was a journey from which he emerged in much the same condition as he went in, tattooed by the tribal history of the *shtetl*. There could be no doubt that he was man enough. But a man who would be of Europe forever, aged before his time. Years later, when I first read Isaac Babel, I actually thought that he must have known my father. Of course, he hadn't. The Jews of Babel's Odessa were less fearful as well as more sophisticated than that Galician peasantry to which my father belonged. Yet I still see him in the depths of imagination tramping through the Russian steppes, as if in an Eisenstein film, cold air permeating his longing for escape into a place that could offer him safety. The experience of being forcibly taken from his home must have been an extension of everything he knew about a Europe that was already in the throat of the *shtetl*. The baggage of the Old World drove his baggage, too.

Nease Library
Eastern Nazarene College
DOES NOT CIRCULATE

It was too much to hope that he not carry that baggage with him to America. Still, I like to think of him as he moves toward manhood. In the movie in my mind, I watch him struggle against the emptiness of the steppes, lost in the dead space as he wanders into a flat endless horizon. I think of him as a boy bold beyond his needs, like Benya Krik, Babel's Odessa gangster. I think of him pushing across a vast white blankness, one eye on the Cossacks, the other on an America already just beyond the horizon. In all the photographs of Babel that I have seen, he looks remarkably like the last picture that was taken of my father in Europe. I know how childish the fantasy is. Yet that God in whom my father believed so passionately can play the fool with any of us. Like Babel, my father understood why the joke is always on those who survive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Among immigrant fathers, the obligations of sons were assumed. Among American sons, knowledge of how and for whom America worked was what defined a man. That knowledge, not the dead rituals of our father's Europe, was important to my brother and me. We both understand this to this day. Yet I still can't explain to Abe the reason why I was excused from *Neilah,* the last attempt to catch God's ear on Yom Kippur before he slammed shut those gates of judgment. In our father's eyes, his older son already had paid God's price—and with interest. Is my brother unable to understand that our father simply decided that God did not need me because even God has His limits? That I was crippled meant that I had earned my way out of further obligation. That Abe was whole meant that he would stand with those whose job it was to beg God to be inscribed in the Book of Life.

Scorched by memory's fires, our imaginary argument continues. Abe tells me of how he asked our father why his presence, not mine, was needed. Before the question can be framed, the answer is apparent. At least, to my brother it is. God's rage is not for worship. I was granted immunity because, in our father's eyes, God had overstepped His own boundaries when He created the virus which took my legs. In such a free-fall, ritual was just another bargaining chip between God and man.

My brother refuses to accept this. Not that he cannot understand it. There are certain immunities a man claims from fate or accident or illness, but they are not to be granted as if they carried lifelong tenure. An immunity gained so many years ago is beyond even God's power to grant. My brother does not even try to keep the irritation from his voice as we speak. We are beyond the dead father. "Because even devotion ends when there is no justice. Do you think that just because you lose your legs, obligation ends?" In our father's mind, the balance has been struck. Losing my legs is enough. Not even the pious are beyond making their own corrupt bargains with the Lord of the Universe.

In the lives of immigrant fathers, redemption took on the shape of American sons. Our job was to make the world safe for him, just as on grafittied schoolyard walls the intention is to distract the mind from what is going on inside. Like the kiss of October's crisp air or a single yellow tulip in the garden of the Episcopal priest on the bottom of the hill on Rochambeau Avenue, ours was a world in which order was to be the miracle that would be served. A pear tree stood behind the synagogue, its ripe yellow fruit tempting the strictures of Yom Kippur fasting. It is one of the pictures held by American sons. My brother and I will each run the risk of not believing, in defiance of our father and his God. The immigrant father still imposes self and will on us, still *davens,* rocking on heel and toe, to praise that God in whom he believes with such simple passion that it is the one thing he possesses of which his American sons are afraid.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was a pious man in a nation where even piety had to absorb the styles of Hollywood manhood. Think of Karl Malden playing the Catholic priest in *On The Waterfront*, crying "Gimme a beer!" to show how regular a Joe he is. Think of Orson Welles in the role of Father Maple thundering against the darkness in John Huston's film version of *Moby Dick*. Like all American sons, my brother and I hungered for power and toughness. But we learned that human nature is not necessarily the nature of those American sons. Had it been his choice to make, our father would have come down on the side of the language of obedience for us, too. We envied his faith as well as his simplicity. Study. Learn. Pray. Be a wise man, a sage. With all the disappointment he must have felt in the triumph of America that he witnessed in the two of us, did he ever sense how much his sons would mourn that immigrant who fed us shame and love?

For immigrant fathers and American sons had such different ideas about what made a man a man. We each carried the ambitions of what we hoped to achieve. We each felt obligated to the self that existed in the mind's eye. Times change—and obligations, like debts, change with them. For our immigrant father, prayer had less to do with how man acknowledged God than with how God chose to acknowledge man. He *davened* into hope, gave himself over to it eagerly, wholeheartedly. For us, prayer was another false note reverberating through his European wilderness, chaining him to the past. What haunted us was the desire to be American men. And we wanted more than an immigrant father could provide in a nation that belonged to the sons, not to the fathers.

Yet as my brother and I wedged ourselves between father and country, we understood that he was lost in our America. The country simply possessed a very different idea of what a man was supposed to be than his own idea. His limited perspective on manhood was what we fled, as America's sons have been doing since Cotton Mather discovered that the true wilderness lay within the embattled heart. We staked our claim against his immigrant ethos. Both Abe and I felt doubt about the paths we had chosen. If our father's way was not better, he himself, we each sensed, was.

The incidents are small, the talents fleeting. To look at the America that the immigrants' sons chose to pursue, one invariably begins with the price demanded for their success. "This is no country for old men," wrote Yeats. He was not, of course, speaking of America but of what time invariably does to bodies as well as to dreams. Yet even if it was not his intention, Yeats might have been speaking for the American sons who lingered in the shadows of their immigrant fathers. Manhood as idea or image has little enough to do with the myths we were all raised on. However boyish and puerile those myths might be, one must say this in their favor: they spoke of what legitimately could be asked of men in this country.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At the end of John Ford's *Stagecoach,* the boyish Ringo Kid rides off with his whore with a heart of gold. There is not much there for imagining manhood beyond John Wayne's awkward limitations as masculine icon. Yet the scene provides us with an effective contrast to what men in America worship today—power. The ability to impose one's bodily presence on others is now considered the only indispensible aspect of being a man. In business, in sports, in the university, even in domestic life, men are urged to celebrate how they can bully others into submission. A "real man" is meant to impose his will and power upon a hostile world. It is not enough that we hail those able to press their needs upon others. Never before in history, not even during The Gilded Age, has this nation been so open in its worship of wealth and power. We are quite willing to ignore those who behave with courage or integrity, since these are the qualities that make us uncomfortable. Like Jonah in the belly of the beast, we sense the sea heaving around our darkness. The wind howls us into silence, the waves lash against the beast's body. And my father's God remains intent on pinching us in the midst of our flight from all those obligations my father believed He wanted us to assume. That men often make of necessity a virtue is among the oldest of clichés. Yet the one truly unforgivable sin a man can commit in today's America is to show that he is physically afraid. Other sins are easily forgiven. The cheat, the liar, the bully—each is excused by a nation which views manhood itself as a form of cheating, lying, and bullying. For a man to brag is considered poor taste only when bragging fails to match performance. Even young boys recognize the truth of Vince Lombardi's dictum, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." Like underwear, morality changes. But losing places a man beyond redemption.

American sons learn to worship not strength of character nor the ability to endure hardship in the pursuit of some larger interest. Ours is a nation content to worship the purity of power and the imposition of force. Not by accident has football surpassed baseball in the affections of American men. Football can speak directly to our love of power. The appeal of the game is that it is open about the ways this nation rewards bullying. Its essence is how one team can impose itself on another team. It is probably also not by accident that in no other game is the word *courage* bruited about so frequently. Exaggerated obligations of success and purpose frame the game of football, just as they increasingly reflect our moments as men.

I sit on the stone steps of the small apartment building in which my brother and I live with our parents. In the street where I once slashed a hockey stick into the empty air, trying to savage the black puck across the manhole cover, Abe is playing a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

game of touch football with a group of his friends. I watch their obligations unfold, filled with an envy as sharp as the press of this November cold. Abe is thirteen, I am seventeen, and the late October air is crisp with the anticipation of winter. My brother and the two other boys on his side clap their hands in that imitation enthusiasm so common with adolescents. In cadence, I hear their voices drone in unison. Childish rhythm of "One Mississippi, two Mississippi." The shape of grievance on a cold afternoon. My brother spins, runs in the direction of the manhole cover to my left. I see the tight spiral cut the air as Abe's body sails high, hands straining outward, until his fingers close on the football and he comes crashing down to creosote, wincing as he hits the ground. But he holds the ball. A moment that leaves me pleased—but burning with envy.

Years later, when Abe is a graduate student at Duke, his wrist aches and he has it x-rayed, only to discover that he had broken it when he dove through the air and caught that football. A minor blip in a man's life, a twinge of occasional pain that will signal a change in the weather. At a writer's conference in Arkansas in the spring of 1996, I meet an artist who used to play touch football with my brother at the University of Memphis, where they both taught. American rituals. The Art Department against the History Department in touch football. He speaks admiringly of Abe's pass-catching ability, and when I mention this to my brother in a real telephone conversation, I hear him laugh happily. In the lives of American sons, the dues of adolescence pay for the passage through. It is not something an immigrant father could understand. It is not like wandering the steppes of Russia. My father was almost the exact age his son, my brother, was when he crashed against asphalt and broke his wrist. My brother knows that a wrist that aches when it rains is a small price to pay for a moment that commands a man's memory of his body. The ache will always be as rich in memory as it is dull as pain.

It's easy enough to ridicule such coming-of-age rites. Stale ideas and dead attitudes, our masculine imperatives have led to the rhetorical nonsense of the men's movement. Yet it is difficult to survive without certain stale ideas and dead attitudes, particularly in an age in which gender consciousness has risen to a veritable flood. Like hawks surveying possibility, the sexes eye each other. Consciousness of gender has much to say about men and women, but very little to say about what manhood is. Even as a word, *manhood* leaves us in a sweat—constructed or deconstructed, a linguistic irritation that scratches at the mind like a bad case of psoriasis. In a parody of the past, Bly's Iron John tells his ghost stories around the camp fires of feverish adolescent imaginations. And that, we are told, is what manhood is.

And yet, American sons should not be shamed out of manhood. If there is too much nostalgia about the thing, that doesn't make it less nec-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

essary or less real. Like the prospect of a grand affair, manhood can be both a sleazy interlude or a true passion. That it partakes of both as it hammers us into the shapes that form us should be obvious. But it isn't. For an immigrant father, the quest was for that God whom he feared in the depths of his heart even as he wandered across the frozen steppes, aware of the immense horizon that lay beyond a prison house called Russia. For a brother whose rage still resounds in my imagination, the need was that I finally admit to what he had been called upon to pay so that I would finally total up the debts and obligations that were rightfully mine. And for me, the truth was the admission that I am more accurate than I know when I speak of disease as a sharing.

Brother and son, I stand in the mind's storm, as much a stranger to those I love as they are to me. It's not enough to accept a brother's anger, to understand his rage at having to stand in for me. It's not enough to search for that immigrant father, alone in a hostile world, as he maneuvers through the blank immensities of landscape, his faith frozen to his fear as he prepares for his passage to an America that exists only in his mind. I suspect that I will never know whether I am as good a man as my brother or as our father. I will never know if my endurance matches or is less than theirs. I only know that as I close in on my life, still trying to balance it out, it is the need to stand as a man that I have come to value. More and more, that has emerged as the thing itself, the portrait revealed, where I see myself—brother, son, father, stranger.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

The Greenhouse

In a small black town, your town,
where even trains linger unwilling,
anxious to be on their way,
in a park, defying soot and shadows,
a gray building stands lined with mother-of-pearl.

Forget the snow, the frost's repeated blows,
inside you're greeted by a damp anthology of breezes,
and the enigmatic whispers of vast leaves
coiled like lazy snakes. Even an Egyptologist
couldn't make them out.

Forget the sadness of dark stadiums and streets,
the weight of thwarted Sundays.
Accept the warm breath wafting from the plants.
The gentle scent of faded lightning
engulfs you, beckoning you on.

Perhaps you see the rusty sails of ships at port,
islands snared in rosy mist, crumbling temples' towers;
you glimpse what you've lost, what never was,
and people with lives like
your own.

Suddenly you see the world lit differently,
other people's doors swing open for a moment,
you read their hidden thoughts, their holidays don't hurt,
their happiness is less opaque, their faces
almost beautiful.

Lose yourself, go blind from ecstasy,
forgetting everything and then perhaps
a deeper memory, a deeper recognition will return,
and you'll hear yourself saying: I don't know how—
the palm trees opened up my greedy heart.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letter from a Reader

Too much about death,
too many shadows.
Write about life,
an average day,
the yearning for order.

Take the school bell as your model
of moderation,
even scholarship.

Too much death,
too much
dark radiance.

Take a look,
crowds packed
in cramped stadiums
sing hymns of hatred.

Too much music
too little harmony, peace,
reason.

Write about those moments
when friendship's foot-bridges
seem more enduring
than despair.

Write about love,
long evenings,
the dawn,
the trees,
about the endless patience
of the light.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Long Afternoons

Those were the long afternoons when poetry left me.
The river flowed patiently, nudging lazy boats to sea.
Long afternoons, the coast of ivory.
Shadows lounged in the streets, haughty manikins in shop fronts
stared at me with bold and hostile eyes.

Professors left their schools with vacant faces,
as if the *Iliad* had finally done them in.
Evening papers brought disturbing news,
but nothing happened, no one hurried.
There was no one in the windows, you weren't there;
even nuns seemed ashamed of their lives.

Those were the long afternoons when poetry vanished
and I was left with the city's opaque demon,
like a poor traveler stranded outside the Gare du Nord
with his bulging suitcase wrapped in twine
and September's black rain falling.

Oh tell me how to cure myself of irony, the gaze
that sees but doesn't penetrate; tell me how to cure myself
of silence.

Translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh

MELANIE REHAK

Apostasy

Is it enough now, have I borne
the hoverings, the chronic roving
long enough? Have you recognized me
walking into the falling, watching the light leave?
And has the light gone past me, can I sleep?

Always the sky comes down alizarin and wide,
no moment of repose, all apogee.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So temper me and go and let me lie.
Let absence knock against itself and rest.
Nowhere left, nothing here:
not the copper in my hair, the scar along my jaw,
nothing in the planes of my forehead.
Let the inquisition of my brows repeat
itself for days unanswered.

My gestures have come about
through time and might as well revert.
Nothing in the palms of my hands.

Almost every tree is bare, my synapses subverted,
then everywhere a palsy taking hold.
The gift, of which I am afraid,
wakes me in the night again.

KARL KIRCHWEY

Juno's Song

I.

Today in the garden,
a peacock spread his tail,
sprung rake of whalebone
corset-stays, balding scribble

of lapis lazuli.
Across the granite curb,
preposterous beauty
began once more to absorb

itself in itself,
swayed by and hoisted
its tent above
your small gold head,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and *amour-propre*
opened its slow fan,
defying the air
for a count of ten.

In the arrogant quiet,
that screen of aqua
played with the fright
and the rapture

in your gaze, then shivered,
poplar-fashion,
and indolently folded
its starry vanes.

II.

Child, how shall I teach
your hundred eyes to sleep,
in which the bird is figured
as on an engraved gem
or a Christian tomb,
its flesh through centuries
thought incorruptible?

Still they blink and watch!
Is it the scream of peacocks
through palm and ancient ilex
by which you are pursued,
through the complicated air
and smell of oleander,
the yell and mew of longing,

into the lapis tabernacle
of your oblivion?
Now they begin to droop
deliciously and swim,
as mundane emerald
contrives to fan the brow
where sleep is building now.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BARBARA JORDAN

Urban Setting

I know the temperament of what we own:
the bureau with its hemisphere of light;

the bedlamp's Grecian scene, faint ormolu;
and Bacon's portrait of the poet Blake,

his features drawn like silk over pearskin,
the petulance of his deathmask, composed

in a sea of black, the way my own face
looks back from the window like a ghost

bathed by the glow of the computer's screen
where tiny planets, moons, and suns

are casting spores of light across a space
as passive as the sky at night—or someone

keeping vigil with discontent, staring
at things she can't articulate;

and pain is far away, it is my satellite.

ALBERTO DE LACERDA

Words do spring from your body
Violent birds of tenderness

All your flights
Space
Immeasurable
I yield to them

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

• • •

You return me to the measure
To the dynamic symmetry
Of the enormous room

You rise up and
With you
My imagination

You go further than the reach of the wind
and return

You say nothing

Translated from the Portuguese by the author and Christopher Middleton

HEATHER McHUGH

Deposition

Nease Library
Eastern Nazarene College
DOES NOT CIRCULATE

I burned the arrows
then I burned the air.

I burned the boats
the bay was taking

for a mere mirage. I took them for
a fact. I saw a sway rise up from what

was turning gold to red and
red to black—I saw the sway,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but couldn't hold it. Whose ring was it,
on the wiry hand? And by the bye

who added good? To hell who added
O? The curves went wavery, and lit the earthen

neighborhood. (Of signs, who knew
the high from low?) The sun

went out—a message from
the bull's-eye to the bow...

CHARLES TOMLINSON

Watching Water

Why is it water, standing for itself,
  Runs to so many meanings? I watch
The flickerings, the flash, the out-and-through
  Past bridges, bank-side, flank
Of sand that rains have thickened to obstruct
  Its progress and have failed. The stream
That was brown and dark all day
  At evening takes—in the low light
Of yellow sundown and begins to brighten.
  The same stream where it flows through the wood
Seems to run over foil: its whisperings
  Fall then, splashing off the hillslope,
To tiny metallic crashes: it springs
  And bounds across the valley next,
Still swift, but fuller now, a bodied sound,
  Invitation to view the gathered present
Thing it is—watched water,
  Voicing a sinuous way near into far.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another Summer

O'Hara admired
"the warm traffic"
(there was less of it then)—
that is my image of him
passing between
two parked cars
and patting the paintwork of one
in affectionate salutation
as if it were a person he already knew.
That was New York in sixty three.
Three more to go.
The month was July when we
lose all apprehension
in the warmth of the world,
our awareness elsewhere
than on personal destiny.
But the place awaited and the hour,
Fire Island offering its sands
to the leisurely attentions of the sea
and the warm traffic of another summer.

STEPHEN SANDY

Exotica

the Tarot deck, originally a trick-taking card game, was invested with esoteric wisdom only in the late 18th century by a French occultist, Antoine de Gebelin, Protestant cleric and Freemason

Back when we smoked and followed the occult,
Gurus of angst, we'd turn the lights down low
And tell the Tarot pack. Joan was our nuncio
Of probable joy, the prophet to consult
For low-downs on the future. To exult

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Was fate in the halcyon, sideburned '70s!
What we meant and other questions were a breeze;
Taking a medium's word felt so adult.
Later we learned those cups and wands, The Wheel
Of Fortune, The World, Judgment—all those trumps—
Had nothing to say; and that renowned Madame
Sosostris, clairvoyante, was daft to deal
Her wicked pack, a card game geared for chumps,
Drawing those colorized blanks on the world to come.

Daphnis and Chloe

Looking at the grass for disease, thoroughly
Unready. There was the sacral moment, the modern scare.
Natural enemies of the zebra mussel or the like. Slices or
Slides of the engineered tomato. Playing the lottery here
With Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Sailing along the sternocoastal surface
Sighting the great cardiac vein in blue the right
Coronary artery in red. This is a mild
Congregation I would say; now look out there
At the willow frond dribbling gold into the sun-breeze.

You have been here before, haven't you, we see only
Moderately high snow drifts which may
Be genetic, but still the most cynical regime
Is prescribed. Some regression of course may be
Possible but unlikely

So you may as well begin papering over
The walls that graphed the figure-ground relationship
In your life, or what you deemed it to be
While something else was happening, or it
Was corruptly but minutely going by.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DONALD REVELL

ARCADY: Conforming to the fashions...

Conforming to the fashions of eternity
I feel no conflict only one with prosperity

Wild work
Needs wilderness

A man from far away in forgetfulness
Shuts my windows each one with apple trees

I accept their company

From far away in the north
Uproar risings inseparable
Now from apple blossoms

Roar at my windows

And each is a real shrine
And each is a real cup a dark one with blue insides

Wild work grows over humans real moss

ARCADY: Meant never to die...

Meant never to die

Map and archive Arcady

Today there was a little heap of doves beside the children

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Agony tree
As if a flood rose
From the earth below me
And not from any stream

Wait

It will be a sweet destruction

Moss wind
Blue cup

The wind on the north side of the tree
Grows in Paradise

In the uproar

EMILY TAYLOR

A

African saying: It takes a whole village to bring up a child.

O you young unwed mothers
under Anglo-Saxon
governments, do you

deserve our countries' aid?
Or shall we cut it, cut it,
cut it to an "A?"

No—not even that—
you're not adulteresses—
your guilt is not just grit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rubbed on and on the mother
till it forms a Pearl.
It's greed, your ugly need,

we do not want to see it.
Oh, you'll not catch us casting
stones or hearts or throwing

money at your problem.
Why did you not unlearn
your adolescent want

for love, for trembling union?
And if not abstinence,
you could have practiced prudence.

You should have built in margins
for mistake, for splitting rubber.
And now it is too late.

Gone the high school stories,
sodden with bodily fluids:
the girls, "She broke down in tears"—

the boys, "There was blood all over
the place." We've spent enough
on you, you unwed mothers,

spilling your milk, and breaking
down all over the place.
No use crying over

you, or yours. We'll sit
and wring our sweating hands
as we worry 'bout the future.

And O and A, and A
and O, we'll sing
to you in chorus.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELIZABETH SPIRES

The Frame

The once-bright silver darkening. A frame
framing a gone likeness of you. Snow outside.
A coldness in the room. Your voice on the telephone,
lost and unsure. Words going back and forth,
and then a click, white silence filling up the line.
Alone, I slip you out of the frame to hold
and hold onto, light seeping through the sepia
tones to color the girl that you once were. On fire.
Your own proud creature. The world at heel.
A pride that carried you through tarnished years.
But time would not stop for you and so you darkened
like a Fury and raged at all you'd loved,
or made, or married, *Betrayed*, you cried, *by all!*
And everything withdrew, granting you dominion
of a place where nothing could live, nothing
except you. But death is the great apologist.
It levels harsh landscapes, it softens the hard lines
in your face and changes the bitterness of memory
into something bittersweet, no longer gall.
The hard hills that you loved are now no more
than gently sloping mounds rounded by falling snow.
And knowing what I know, I know that days unimaginable
wait. They wait for us. You will be mourned.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Burial

Perhaps one sultry, somber night,
Behind some hovel—crumbling, old—
A tender-hearted Christian might
Bury your body, late extolled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then will the taintless stars begin
To close tired eyes; a-crawl among
Your last remains, spider will spin
Her web, and viper spawn her young.

Year out, year in, over your head
Entombed, will sound the doleful, dread
Howl of the wolves; screech of the foul,

Rattleboned witches; and the sprees
Of hoary graybeard debauchees,
And schemes of black-souled thugs a-prowl.

The Lone Man's Wine

The courtesan's especial glance—her air
That glides our way, as when the moon, a-shiver,
Sends down her beam over the lake, a-quiver,
To bathe therein her beauty devil-may-care;

A gambler's last few coins, clutched in his hand;
A kiss from Adeline, all skin and bones;
A wheedling tune, persistent, like the moans
And wails of human woes in distant land;

None of all that, O bottle deep, is worth
The pungent balms your belly's fertile girth
Holds for the pious poet's thirsting heart;

You pour out hope for us, and life, and youth,
—And pride, that boon that gilds the wretch uncouth,
And sets us all, like conquering Gods, apart!

Translated from the French by Norman Shapiro

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITH KURZWEIL

Film à la mode

When Californians refer to "the business," they mean the movies. When New Yorkers refer to the film festival, they pride themselves on their sense of discrimination, on the ability to distinguish between movies that entertain and serious film—amusement as opposed to art. However, the film festival—work by the most talented film makers from around the world—has become serious business. Just to observe producers, film makers, critics, professors of film, their students, and the hangers-on networking busily, yet seemingly nonchalant, over coffee and croissants at the previews of the New York Film Festival or to follow the bulletins about productions being picked up by one or another mainstream distributor will convince even the most skeptical that art films are a part of the entertainment business.

Since my own livelihood depends on the university, I could see at most half of this year's selections, which, however, gave me a sense of the entire menu. According to a pre-festival interview with one of the judges, they inadvertently picked films centering on families. Is that because traditional family values once again are meant to come back into vogue? Because delving with fresh intensity into the complexities of human nature will lead viewers to search the earliest and innermost reaches of their own psyches? Or because fantastically new and speeded-up equipment, artful medleys of sound mixes and effects that bust even the most hardened eardrums, and novel combinations of lush, psychedelic colors will entice the audience to freely associate to successions of split second images they are unable to verbalize? When Roland Barthes wrote of the space between the words in writing, into which readers may project their own illusory, tabooed thoughts, he did not wholly anticipate a world without spoken language, a post-modern mode of expression through flashing images and bodily gestures rather than tongues. (This is what occurred to me while listening to a panel of talented American film people explain their work in nearly inarticulate English.)

In the first film I got to see, a German/Russian production of *Mother and Son*, the lonely, moody scenery serves as the backdrop for a conflicted, caring son who sacrifices his life to await his mother's death. It's a curious recapitulation of renaissance scenes in a painterly, desolate panorama, of Madonna and child *à la Russe*. Here, outmoded family values are too exaggerated and idealized to seem probable.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another mother and son, in an equally forsaken countryside, this one in southern Belgium, are the central characters in *La vie de Jesus*. Here, the mother worries about her unemployed and epileptic Freddy, who, when he isn't having sex with the beautiful Marie, is roaming the dour dunes of the Belgian coast on his motorbike with his four pals. After a swarthy foreigner starts to pursue Marie, Freddy and his friends go after this (amiable) "Arab," on whom the basically nice Freddy eventually vents all his pent-up anger, and who ends up dying. During the press conference, the director, Bruno Dumont, explained that he chose the title because he thought that if Jesus were living today, he too would be estranged from his surroundings and living in a deserted area.

Ma vie en rose, the story of the sensitive seven-year-old Ludovic, who doesn't understand why he shouldn't dress as a girl, is a thoughtful, compassionate French film. Free of hype, it demonstrates that enforcing traditional values may ruin a whole family's life: the father loses his job; children, neighbors and teachers ostracize them all; and they are forced to move from middle class comfort to lower class constrictions. Throughout this tale, the plastic fairy princess keeps gliding over the rooftops, seemingly guiding Ludo to a friend, the bouncy, assertive Christine who insists on being called Brian. This (flawed) happy ending, I assume, is intended to teach tolerance to the film's viewers.

Martin (Hache)'s family, whose father, the filmmaker Martin (without the middle initial H.), has left him with his mother in Buenos Aires to settle in Madrid, is even less conventional. After accidentally sniffing an overdose of drugs and nearly dying, Martin (Hache) ends up living with his father. The elder Martin loves a peppy, younger women but won't commit to her and his best friend is an overtly gay exhibitionist—the most straight and moral person in this complicated tale of a modern generation divided by political events and geography and even more so by selfishness and egotism. Miraculously, this far-out family ends up "saving" the charming, laid-back Hache after the girlfriend's suicide in this action-packed, enjoyable film.

Another production centering on a family, albeit a torn one, is *Voyage to the Beginning of the World*, which features Marcello Mastroianni as a film director. While on location in Portugal, he travels with two of his actors to his father's birth place, which he has known only via family lore. This mixture of nostalgia and visual impressions, mostly seen through the rear window of their moving car as they go to visit the relatives' dark, impoverished home and their bright, well-kept cemetery symbolizes the journey of everyone's life and its myriads of contradictory emotions—which are particularly poignant since the recent death of Mastroianni.

Destiny is yet another sort of trip into the past, when it was taken for granted that families stick together. This hilarious spectacular-cum-musical,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which one interviewer compared to a Western, is about Muslim Andalusia in the twelfth century. The philosopher Averroës, who inspired his young followers to study the Greek philosophers, dedicated his life to fighting against narrow religious orthodoxy. The film's celebrated director, Chahine, an Egyptian whose last film was banned in Egypt, combines political courage with a sense for comedy by telling a serious story about the need for freedom in this fast moving, entertaining mega-production.

Telling Lies in America, a tale about a Hungarian teenager who lies to shortcut his way into America and his father, who studies to fulfill his dream of becoming a citizen, illuminates the struggle of every new immigrant. In this touching drama, the gullible Karchy is taken in by a four-flushing disk jockey—an updated version of the swindling tricksters preying on greenhorns. Whether to rat on his crooked benefactor and become a citizen or to give up his quickly gained riches is Karchy's emotional dilemma, which is portrayed by an excellent cast that keeps the audience in suspense. It is a coming-of-age story with which everyone can identify.

In *The Apostle* Robert Duvall is both director and star. Seeking salvation for an act of violence—while running from the law—he baptizes himself and sets up a ministry in a black bayou town in Lousiana. His impressive performance brilliantly lays open the appeal of evangelist preachers to simple people. In this particular case, the people replace the apostle's own family. Nevertheless, this film's relationship to the idea of family is tenuous at best.

From here on, the family theme no longer holds unless we count the mute ex-con's videos of his father in *Fallen Angels* as more than another aspect of his obsessions. Outside the home, he breaks into stores after hours and forces his customers to buy his wares. He is not the main character in this feverish film set in Hong Kong—a masterpiece of reckless, frenzied action, portraying a dispassionate, professional hit man, his glamorous booking agent who prefers masturbation to men and shares his living quarters but whom he never meets, a crazy blonde prostitute who goes in for philosophy, and an assortment of other weirdos.

Kiss and Kill, about a pair of young, good-looking drifters who earn their keep by "rolling" the businessmen Nikki picks up and who are obliged to escape when one of their marks accidentally dies, is another thriller-cum-art film. While pursued through the superb Australian landscape by the police and the sports celebrity whose incriminating tape was in the suitcase they stole, they con and kill everyone who trusts and harbors them and eventually come to distrust each other. In a final twist, we learn that Al has a father who, though disowning him, hires the top-notch lawyer who eventually gets them off the murder rap—to bask in the sun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The scenery in *Deep Crimson* is equally breathtaking and even more gory. The lovers are just as debauched and their killings just as perfunctory as Nikki's and Al's. Coral, an overweight, half-deranged nurse who lives in a world of movie-related visions, meets Charles Boyer's look-alike through a lonely hearts ad in a newspaper. After a night of heavy love making she discovers that he preys on lonely widows and spinsters and, rather than be rid of him, abandons her home, her job and her children to be with him. With Coral's help, they meet love-sick women whom Nicolas seduces and whom the insanely jealous Coral ends up murdering. After the last victim's child witnesses her mother's death, she kills her as well. That is when Nicolas calls the police to end their way of life. After a mad chase and eventual arrest in a god-forsaken locality, still unable to grasp their villainy, they are shot in cold blood by the Mexican police.

Fast, Cheap and Out of Control depicts the activities of four dedicated one-track minds: a lion trainer, a gardener, a rocket builder, and a behavioral scientist. This full-scale exploration of the similarities of the worlds of animals, metaphysics, and humanity tells us more than we want to know about mole rats and lion taming, the growth of bushes, and the construction of robots. The other documentaries at this festival were short pieces which in the press showings mostly preceded the features. To me the most memorable of these are *Breeze, Efpsyche, The Rocking Horse, Triste,* and *Synopsis.* But all of the shorts, primarily sustained by visual impressions, fantasies and sound effects, or total silence, belong to the avant-garde. Some are intentionally silent. It seems as if their directors—young experimental film makers—are graphically filling in Barthes' spaces between words. Since film works on and through emotions, using images, colors, sounds, and action, film students inevitably try to project their own unconscious onto the screen. Thus the buzz before and after each showing has everything to do with the business of making film, with how and why one director bungled an ending, another missed a chance, and yet another splashed blood too far or too ineffectively. And with getting into the big time, that is, with the business of reaching and entertaining as large an audience as possible.

What then is the common thread running through these art films? Does anything at all distinguish them from diverting movies? Certainly they all endeavor to engage their viewers by putting new twists on old themes or, preferably, to dramatize something totally novel that startles and stuns. Consequently, corruption and debauchery, crime with or without punishment, where the fusion of gaiety and beauty with sexual scenes and crimes provides the best chance to be creative, has been a more dominant theme at this festival than what we conventionally understand as family. Although I do not wax nostalgic for the little house on the prairie, I did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expect that one or another film might evoke tears (on the screen and in the audience) that were not induced by anger.

Aimless and arbitrary killing and maiming—by vehicles, knives, guns, and other firearms—are bound to remind us of the imponderables of postmodern society, where anything goes, where anything may happen. Still, to the point that prejudice and hurtful behavior are disturbing and ambivalence is retained, a few of these festival films may qualify as art. This year's crop does not feature wars or totalitarian torture except peripherally and instead offers many graphic, drawn-out close-ups of masturbation and sexual intercourse. Is pubic hair really of interest or does it merely titilate? Why linger so long on pools of blood or the wounds on victims' bodies? To judge by the applause or laughter at the most outrageous scenes, this audience of film people appeared to appreciate best the noisiest and most appalling spectacles and those combining adultery with shootings.

It's easy enough to joke that "it's the culture, stupid," to recoil and say that "it's time to push for family values," or to shrug and assume that postmodernism as an outgrowth of modernism must continue to transgress boundaries. (Never mind that some postmodern theorists argue the opposite.) I find that Mapplethorpe's and Serrano's depictions pale by comparison with, for instance, Coral, who serves rat poison to one victim and clobbers another before embalming her, or with the stunningly lovely Nikki, who so routinely kills whoever crosses her path. Under the circumstances, what road may lead us to the family values we allegedly crave?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HEIDI URBAHN DE JAUREGUI

The Art of Getting By

Before placing the taped up bundle of diaries into the safe-deposit box of a California bank, Thomas Mann wrote on it, in English, "Daily notes from '33 to '51. No literary value" and added that no one was to open it until twenty years after his death. He knew well what he was doing. He had always been a clever steward of his fame and understood the steps that had to be taken to ensure that it survived him. Anything that was not advantageous to it he routinely destroyed. Thus we are missing a number of his diaries, particularly those of his youth. Yet, it seems to have been important to him that the diaries in the bank, these "all-too-human" records, make their way to readers. A concern for literary form is clearly evident, even more so than in many of his letters. These diaries were more than an attempt to siphon off the trivial in order to prevent it from making its way into his literary works—they were evidence of Mann's view of himself as the last representative of a vanishing, bourgeois artistic age; a fossil whose every action was worth documenting and should be considered in relation to the entire work—indeed, the epoch. He was right when he referred to the period from 1875 to 1950 as "my age." And, because he was the symbol of an age, we still find the much-maligned snippets from his diaries fascinating ("abdominal stoppage," "rectal irritation," "trips to the hairdresser.") When we read these things, we don't ignore them. On the contrary: we greedily take them in and are thankful, self-righteously pleased to discover that such a man's feet, if not made of clay, are firmly planted in the humus of the all-too-human. These are the small satisfactions: we want this so that we too can join in the discussion, have our say. That we can feel this way attests to Thomas Mann's symbolic existence and to the canny precautions he took to ensure that he would continue to exist in such a way. Thus, an entry like that of August 6, 1945 does not seem quite so audacious: "into Westwood to shop for white shoes and colored shirts.—First attack on Japan, with bombs demonstrating the power of the split atom (uranium)." Clearly we find these entries interesting only because of who wrote them. And if we desire, we can take pleasure from the fact that the giants seem to be as helpless in the face of the moment as the rest of us.

All detail is boring if it lacks ideational clarity, said the young Thomas Mann, and in order to achieve that clarity he resolved—as he put it to his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brother Heinrich, whose own inclinations were entirely dissimilar—to "create a regimen" for himself. Even in his youth the austere younger brother was driven to achieve. In one of his later diaries he wrote that one had to elevate one's life subjectively. If this were done with fantasy and intensity others would be induced "to play along." After all, why should anyone confronted with such devotion be a spoilsport? He was lucky and knew it early on: even as a boy he hopped through the house wearing winged shoes made of paper; as a youth he had a bust of "the conqueror Napoleon" on his desk and conducted readings sitting in a tuxedo in a large chair between two candelabra. A century earlier, as a boy, Honoré de Balzac is said to have cried out as he saw Napoleon riding across the Champ de Mars that he, like the emperor, would one day conquer the world. These great writers began full of self-assurance. In the Joseph novels we find the path of the chosen one "blessed with blessings from Heaven above, with blessings from the depths, which lie below."

A lot came from below, to be sure, and it required the strictest self-supervision to become blessed. Tonio Kröger's maxim that a writer, already adventurous enough on the inside, should always dress well and behave properly to others was Thomas Mann's guiding principle as well. Their radical difference on this point, more than anything else, caused the rift between Mann and his brother and, later, between Mann and his son. He felt nauseated by the "boring shamelessness of [Heinrich's] eroticism, by his sensuality's mindless and soulless obsession with groping." It was suspected that deep down he was envious of this and of his son's casual homosexual lifestyle. After all, he oriented his entire life towards his writing and, if his diaries are to be believed, all lasting joy was the product of one's industry. But how could Klaus Mann, who, as he himself confesses, experienced everything save remorse, who gratefully accepted "pederasty" as an "intoxicant," as an "intensification of life," who never said no to drugs or "anything else," and for whom "intimacy with death" was an essential element in an "awareness of life"—how could he find a solid foundation on which to erect great works of literature? The father takes his son to task. After reading Klaus Mann's posthumously released *The Turning Point*, an "agonizing" task, Thomas Mann writes in his diaries of "a diseased literary existence, attracted to all that is indolent," with no sense for "that which is blessed in life, that which is holy." Klaus Mann was proof of the maxim that great men should have no sons.

But the children—six in all—were part of the picture of bourgeois normalcy, of the regimen Thomas Mann had created for himself. Even his marriage to a "fairy-tale bride," who brought with her the promise of a "stern joy" and whose childhood portrait by Kaulbach hung in his room when he was a boy in Lübeck, was calculated to feed the ever-present

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

symbolism of his life. He assured his brother that his joy was too much "akin to experience, movement and discovery, too little akin to peace and too closely to suffering" for it ever to become "a lasting danger" to his art. It certainly couldn't; the joy that was truly capable of diverting him from the charted course was not to be had "from woman." And so it was that his desire to have a certain kind of life, to create in a certain way, drove him to enter into a selfish and calculated marriage. Katja Pringsheim was an attractive, educated young woman. That she was wealthy didn't hurt his plans. It seems that she consented wholeheartedly to her role behind the scenes and that it gave her a sense of fulfillment. Her grandmother, the Berlin women's rights activist Hedwig Dohm, was scarcely justified in her disappointment over the early marriage of the promising mathematics student. As a mathematician's assistant, her granddaughter could have made a worse name for herself than that of Katja Mann, or rather "Frau Thomas Mann," as she sometimes proudly called herself. Thomas Mann's daughter reports that the author displayed deep emotion—a depth of emotion where he became unsure of his voice—only two or three times at private appearances: once during a reading of *Doktor Faustus*, and once while giving a speech on the occasion of his wife's seventieth birthday.

With supreme confidence Thomas Mann erected the scaffolding onto which, as his diary clearly shows, the distressing "experiences of the senses" attached, even into his old age. He was a true successor to Goethe, save that the agents of distress in his case were always young men. At seventy-seven he asked himself in dismay if he still had his power to create, now that love had deserted him; he was convinced that only that which was "taught by Eros" could shine in art. In *Death in Venice* he describes how he would have fared had he abandoned the rigid guiding principle of his life—the deeply bourgeois doctrine of renunciation. One detects the strains of Platonism: "And so, in fact, it is generally neither Eros nor any of love's activities which are noble and worthy of praise but rather that thing which knows how to love nobly." And how does one love "nobly"? Even the twenty-one year-old knows the answer: "I am tormented by my sexuality. . .we must separate love from the lower abdomen." Aschenbach, the protagonist in *Death in Venice*, attempts to separate them as he takes up the role of Socrates and begins to wax philosophic. And it is true that giving love a soul and depth might work—for a while. Aschenbach is able to manage it for "a page and a half of choice prose" before the whole enterprise begins to collapse. But Thomas Mann was more practical than Aschenbach with regard to his work and was, as he faithfully recorded, in the habit of sorting out matters—lower abdominal matters—on his own. He did this, incidentally, without any of that "consciousness of sin" which his son Klaus had found so irritating in his father.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His diary gives an exact account of his "last adventure," which had at its center a young waiter. In the photo of the young man one sees an unprepossessing face, the very sight of which, however, was enough to make the heart of the world-renowned old man palpitate nervously. Later, after moving to New York, the waiter confessed that he had had no idea of what he was said to have provoked. The author ponders the "injustice in Cupid's aim": while "thousands" would "relish" a short conversation with him, would view it as a "joy and a distinction," this man can only respond to him with a waiter's friendliness. We see here a curious example of love's folly: after returning home the author longs for a letter from his waiter—someone for whom "writing [is] naturally difficult"—in response to his own warm, yet utterly proper, note.

Maintaining distance was an integral part of these erotic experiences. In one entry the author, having just described the tremendous depth of his emotion, writes, "was happy to be alone, free of his proximity." And later he asserts that a "test to see how far [the waiter] would be willing" would be wholly inconsistent with a life that demands secrecy—thus he is able to "return to work as a substitute for joy." This need to get back to work was behind everything, and it probably helps explain his perfect presence of mind during opportunities for happiness. The viewing, the seeing, was most important. "In your breath my word takes form." This line from the love sonnets of Michelangelo haunted him, and he decided to write an essay on them. He loved working on it but realized somewhat later that the work wasn't particularly successful; the subject matter was too close to his own personal experiences. Goethe's encounter with Ulrike von Levetzow in Marienbad had also long preoccupied him, and he wanted to write about it, but then discarded the idea for one more distanced from himself: *Lotte in Weimer*. He once referred to Hölderlin's short, two-stanza "Socrates und Alcibiades," as the world's most beautiful love poem. And now, on the occasion of his final love, he recalls: "He who has pondered the deepest truths loves what is most alive. . .And in the end the wise / Will bow down to the beautiful." A wisdom that surrenders to beauty, which depends on unconsciousness, was the fate of many great men, Thomas Mann among them. Yet he was woman-friendly enough to discard old ideals: his desires did not run to a prattling, prancing Gretchen. And as to homosexuality, which in his case could better be called homoeroticism, he never abandoned his characteristically severe standards. He read André Gide's journal and judged it harshly. Gide expresses, he wrote, an all-too obvious, sexually aggressive behavior towards young people, "with no regard, no respect for them, with no hint of shame for his age, soulless, in fact loveless." Or is this really an old man's condemnation of every eroticism that crosses the boundaries of propriety? But at one point he bursts out: "How can anyone sleep with a man?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He observed early that reality guides feeling to the point of absurdity. This also had to do with his aversion to any sort of close physical contact, which quickly smacked of the promiscuity he despised. He is "exhausted, outraged and repulsed" when he has to fight his way to the dining car in the train. For longer train trips he typically booked two sleepers—one for himself and one for his wife. One of the few disagreements with her noted in the diary centers around the oppressive closeness of traveling: "Unfortunately, lit into K. rather badly. Long for a solitary refuge. Am fine, personally."

And yet he became impatient and helpless when, on occasion, his wife and eldest daughter, his Antigone-daughter, left him alone. "Days of solitude in store," he records dejectedly, adding ominously: "at the mercy of the telephone." He had erected a barrier, constructed a shelter to protect himself from the world: his family. In fact, some of his six children, for financial or other reasons, required help from their parents throughout their lives. And even though his wife carried the lion's share of the burden, his portion was more than enough when one considers what he was willing to subject himself to. We see this little world in the diaries—acting as arbiter in sibling squabbles and his daughters' marital crises, critiquing the work of children who were becoming authors in their own right. Christmas parties with grandchildren, assorted pieces of advice, all took a symbolic place in the writer's life structure. The family, somewhat symbolically, probably became the most renowned artistic family of the century. There are touching moments as well: compassion for his eldest daughter, who often hid away, bitter at her siblings and the world, and for his Swiss daughter-in-law, who was pale and quiet because she was having "a hard time of it with the nervous, egomaniacally ambitious, tyrannical father of her children," his son, the violinist. He was a keen-eyed father and grandfather. It would, for example, probably be more accurate to classify his love for his grandson, Frido (the Echo-child in *Doktor Faustus),* as one of those adventures of the senses which helped him to create. He closely observed the growing boy's progress and held out the possibility that "nothing particularly pleasant" would come of him. After witnessing some trifling misbehavior by Frido's younger brother he wanted to put the boy into a home for maladjusted children. He learned of his eldest son's suicide while on a lecture tour. In the diary we see his deep compassion for his wife and for the daughter who was Klaus's favorite sister. For his own part he notes no emotion, as though doing so were not his responsibility. In art, every lie comes out—lies don't even make it into the diary. He simply puts on a black tie and continues with the tour. People are waiting for him, personal tragedy or not—and his wife goes with him. His son's suicide had been coming for a long time; there had been repeated threats and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

several attempts. Even his sister had given up hope in the face of his increasingly severe drug addiction. The suicide simply eliminated a source of disorder.

Thomas Mann's life was constantly besieged by disorder of the most dangerous kind, which could only be combatted by the most severe self-discipline. Actually, a number of other things were required such as creature comforts, which were useful in helping him to maintain distance. This sentiment is expressed in *Tonio Kröger* when Tonio says that anyone "who suffers so much more than others internally, is perfectly justified in insisting on a little external ease." So a life of luxury is compensation—albeit woefully inadequate—for the extraordinary suffering of God's chosen or, perhaps, the condition under which that suffering can to some degree be borne. Thomas Mann possessed not only the means but the circumspection and resolve to set himself up as comfortably as possible throughout his roving life. The fact is, Mann went through life utterly convinced that he was lucky. This conviction was the prerequisite for a lifetime of work completed at the edge of exhaustion. Due to this conviction he wasn't entirely surprised when the influential millionaire Agnes Meyer stood ready to be his benefactor and agent when he arrived in America. That she thought her role entitled her to certain privileges was her mistake. Thomas Mann wrote polite letters to her, then put what he really thought in his diary. When he noticed that the old silk robe she had sent him was beginning to tatter, the entry in his diary reads: "Bargain trash—typical of her gifts." She gave him such costly presents that—as she once told him, when thanks for a Christmas gift were late in coming—he could have supported himself for a year on each of them. Even after his return to Europe he asked her, in the most gallant, flowery words, for an emerald ring for his eightieth birthday. Clear stones delighted him, and his family could never afford such a gift. After all, what is a jewel from a millionaire compared to a prettily-composed letter from Thomas Mann? As it turns out, the question is speculative, for the millionaire managed not to fulfill his last birthday wish. At the end of his stay in America, after an anti-American article appeared under his name (but which he had not written) she wrote him an "hysterical" letter. He answered her, but not quite as he might have liked. In his diary he wrote, "This person, blinkered by her class and money, thinks her banal and bogus patriotism gives her the right to lecture me. She won't soon forget me." There is evidence that she was a fine woman. But that doesn't concern us here. It was her money and willingness to serve which were part of the order of his life.

The money was a drop in the bucket compared to what he gave humanity. How could his contribution be repaid? The whole of his little country wouldn't have sufficed. What genius gives us cannot be repaid—and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more often than not, no one even tries. At the end of his life Thomas Mann determined that he was virtually penniless. He had a medium-sized house in the mountains. The average businessman had a better one.

The only adequate compensation is posthumous fame, which is granted to very few. Mann: "They have done everything for the virtue of immortality, for immortality is cherished above all else." The hope for posthumous fame differs in that one wishes to survive with one's terrestrially determined identity intact—an identity that has already become conscious of itself. The fear that the world was coming to an end, an end that would bring with it the extinguishing of any hope for posthumous fame, increasingly occupied Thomas Mann in his old age. As he finished his last work, *The Holy Sinner*, he contemplated this eventuality: "Our present-day literature, the most elevated and refined of it, often seems to me to be a farewell, an attempt to conjure up the occidental myth once again before the night falls, a long night, perhaps, and a deep forgetting." At seventy-five he asks himself if greatness and genius are still possible in an age which is "sympathetic to all that is lazy, slovenly, reactionary and wicked," and views himself as "consummator" and one of the last people, perhaps the last person who "even knows what a work is." Today we have ceased to consider the possibility of greatness and consider the creation of a great work to be an anachronism. Our thinking runs along these lines: because we were taken in at one time by "great men"—meaning, above all, Hitler—we would just as soon restrain ourselves when it comes to Thomas Mann. Our age finds it difficult to single out masters and masterpieces, so we maintain that what is extraordinary is fundamentally undesirable.

Thomas Mann pitilessly examined the signs of the times which threatened both himself and his work. He considered analyses of the future, which simply promulgate individual hopes and desires a "descent into the plains of optimism." He never gave up his attempts to arrive at some sort of understanding with his age and was surprised at how much he needed its recognition. At seventy-seven, after a public reading he writes: "Applause, but applause which doesn't last long enough to call me back into the hall once I've left; this upsets me every time, as if I were a child." Even at nineteen he was familiar with "childish vanity," writing that "sometimes [my] stomach turns from ambition." Mann desired everybody's praise, a central theme in numerous diary entries: "People talking about my presence on the train" and "Swiss man at the table, a train engineer, became tremendously excited when he discovered my identity;" and "Swiss customs agent asks for autograph." He awaited newspaper reports about a reading with "childish impatience." When Mann, a Nobel Prize winner, learned he was to receive an award in Italy, he asked every possible acquaintance to spread the news because he would feel sorry for his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"gentleman enemies" if the "presentation [were] to go by the board." He awaited with utmost longing a communication from Robert Schuman which would announce that he was to be decorated with the Officer's Cross of the Legion of Honor. Although not exactly a francophile, he records the wording of the encomium in great detail: *Un hommage rendu par la France à l'exceptionelle valeur. . . .* He observed his own self-satisfaction on receiving it, examining the cross and parading around the room with it. He remarks, "I can't keep my eyes off it." In the history of great minds one encounters this zealous pursuit of recognition from society's powerful over and over again. Why else did Velásquez go to such lengths to gain admission to the Order of Santiago? The humiliation he endured in doing so is the same sort of thing Heine subjected himself to in his student fraternity. Perhaps the recognition of the age, acceptance by its representatives, is anticipatory praise, early laurels from the wreath to be woven by posterity, a reflection of the fame for which Herculean tasks are carried out. Who could blame such men for looking for a bit of balm to ease their constant, titanic suffering? "Am so sore that everything soothes me and cheers me up for a moment," he writes after some bit of praise and is delighted that a letter addressed only to "Thomas Mann, Amerika" reaches him. To have won "the favor of our contemporaries" is an "unfailing joy," observed the Olympian from Weimar—and Thomas Mann set it down in his diary.

It has been said he was an "egocentric person," and his older brother spoke early on of the younger Mann's "raging passion for his own self." But an "overwrought sense of self" is simply an occupational characteristic of the creative writer. Yet it does seem curiously pretentious, downright parvenu, in fact, when the writing turns with casual emphasis to breakfast, for example, to the morning caviar that once again didn't quite taste right or the champagne poured at dinner yesterday. Discussing the inadequacy of this or that maid or proudly mentioning the chauffeur's new cap are more *nouveau riche* than patrician, as is putting the top down on his newly-acquired Horch convertible and having himself photographed with the chauffeur in the back seat. This dynamic is not unique to Thomas Mann, but the desire to gain some small substantiation—from the upper classes, of course—of future recognition. Those who came before him purchased this with a bit of bowing and scraping to the nobility. Thomas Mann adds to that a certain enjoyment of dressing up. In his youth he had a dandy's wardrobe. Well, Goethe began as a fop. Yet the photo of Mann in the car is downright funny, as are those of him in tropical, street, and drawing-room garb.

He was familiar with the unscrupulous side of artistic genius, recognizing the fine line between the sublime and the ridiculous. Without such

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a sense he couldn't have portrayed it as he did in *Felix Krull*, for example, though he did ask himself when he resumed work on the story after a 43-year hiatus if it was *de mon âge*, if one should turn "the powers of one's advanced years to such jokes."

He knew his capabilities. At eighty, when he wanted to begin working out the details of a play called "Luther's Wedding," an art-savvy guardian angel ripped the pen from his hand in the nick of time. He was aware of the fact that the words his characters uttered could hardly be thought of as having "material philosophical importance," and he knew as well that he was no scintillating aphorist. That was why he adamantly refused permission for a collection of aphorisms which had been culled from his works. According to Thomas Mann, in words from *Death in Venice*: "The writer's joy is found in the thought that can wholly become feeling, the feeling that can wholly become thought," constituted the "brightest" of his "aphoristic flashes," and they remained uncollected. Unfortunately, however, these words aren't Thomas Mann's at all but were adopted almost verbatim from work by Platen. In art one "deals in absolutes," which isn't "child's play," he said, not without immediately adding, "But then again, it is child's play." Following a reading from *The Holy Sinner* he angrily notes "the typical crudeness of the philosopher Marcuse, who was merely very amused by it all. It is funny, thank God, but it still isn't only funny."

His faith in his extraordinary destiny was central to his ability to cope with life. *The Holy Sinner* takes up this theme. And later, regarding Joseph, he writes: "Often I admire it entirely objectively, purely as phenomenon, how a well-meaning individual is able to win against even the most unfavorable circumstances and make the best of it for himself." When one considers how Mann's life, rooted deeply in German middle-class mentality, was completely derailed by political events and how he nevertheless was able to make "the best" of it for himself and his countrymen, one is amazed. By his own confession apolitical, deeply ensnared in the precarious philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, he ended his life as the acknowledged guiding light of German emigration. He received the Nobel Prize for *Buddenbrooks* and *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*; for his tireless work in the service of freedom and human dignity he was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Legion of Honor. He steadfastly refused to second-guess himself, insisted stubbornly in his old age that his life had been characterized by a "developing unity." That there had been discontinuity in his life was a "stupid fable." *Reflections* was an "extremely truthful book written in the wrong key," from which he had learned a great deal, for it was a work of spiritual distress and truly arduous self-examination for which he had to be grateful if only because the lengthy ordeal made *The Magic Mountain* possible. He maintained that it was not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his way to disassociate himself from himself. This, of course, is also a bit of posturing.

Reflections of an Unpolitical Man is an odd conglomeration of bright flashes of insight and dangerous lapses into the reactionary. Its basic premise, which he confessed in his old age remained "true and incontestable," was that "democracy and politics are one and the same." He did have a lifelong aversion to politics—particularly while traveling from country to country as an "itinerant spokesman for democracy." But was he really unpolitical? During the time of the soviet republic in Munich, one finds outbursts in his diary such as "The west must be saved from the horror of mass migration from below" and, following the bloody suppression of the revolt, "Katja's Mother thinks it's getting too 'militaristic' again, but I'm in complete agreement and find it is considerably easier to breathe under military dictatorship than under the rule of drunkards." The old Thomas Mann writes, "The world which comes after ours will be impossible to imagine without communist traits, that is without the basic idea of the rights of common ownership and common consumption of the earth's bounty, without an ongoing leveling of class differences, without the right to work and the duty to work for all. The blind hatred of communism is utter foolishness." It is hardly conceivable that the older man's ideas followed a straight trajectory from the younger man's ideas. Twice this led him to the brink of despair. *Reflections* is the enunciation of his first lengthy lapse into depression; traces of the second, shorter but steeper descent—precipitated by his definitive break with Germany in the mid-1930s—can be found only in his diary. Thankfully, he was able to quell this depression during his work on *Joseph* and the Goethe novel and to displace it with a completely artistic cheerfulness. Except in his diary, his political pronouncements zigzag from this point on and the degree to which his pronouncements went against the grain becomes clear time and time again—which makes it all the more amazing that he forced himself to make them. He once noted with deep appreciation Goethe's remark regarding a dramatic piece of the day, that it dealt "solely with the aristocracy and democracy" which could be of "no general human interest."

As a successor to Goethe he later sensed that he was a man who sought balance by nature and had been forced to take sides only by the exigencies of adverse times. "I am a man of balance. I instinctively lean to the left when the boat threatens to roll right and capsize, and vice versa." As a representative of the bourgeoisie he had already given his all, and more bravely than others. But he had realized in the end that "nothing living" can escape "politics" and that "abstaining" is also "politics," the only difference being that by abstaining one practices the "politics of evil." His later diaries contain substantial commentary on this inescapability. They

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

show an impassioned critic of the Cold War—a war since won by the country he left once again at the age of seventy-seven. He uses words which one hardly dares use today, so powerful are our internal censors. He talks of the "dictator-dollar" and "economic imperialism," of the "Marshallization" and "colonization" of Europe, is pained by Europe's willingness to prostitute itself, regards the term "free nations" as an empty turn of phrase, and says that it is becoming increasingly "embarrassing to have to travel with an American passport." But he mistrusted the Germans even more; he visited Germany in 1949 for the first time since his emigration on the occasion of the two celebrations in honor of Goethe—and did so expressly as an American citizen. He did insist early on that America's goal was world conquest. He remarked that the United States was paying out millions of dollars to "stop the revolution in Asia and prevent much-needed socialism in Europe." During the Korean War he wrote that "the lie of self-defense" was so insufferable that he had been "on the verge of tears" for hours. The "unpolitical" man, in 1952, was already predicting a brilliant future for Germany, maintaining that "its hegemony in Europe" is "absolutely inevitable." A character in one of his novels of the 1930s says that general human conduct constitutes a "shameless disloyalty" to the vanquished ideal and a "capitulation in the face of success" and that the age demonstrates humanity's "servility."

In the 1950s he quotes words which had been spoken twenty years before: "The new, the social world, the organized world of unity and planning...will arrive because an external rational order which corresponds to the stage reached by the human spirit will have been achieved or, at the very worst, will have been put in place by a violent and radical change." To this he adds, "If one said and wrote such things at that time, in that way one remained at least partly a man of honor." He quotes from one of his talks on Goethe—and in a manner that strikes us today as extremely odd—he ends by asking "whether it isn't more likely that today Goethe's gaze would be directed towards Russia rather than towards America." And as far as a certain "disdain for despotism" on Goethe's part is concerned, it is, says Mann, well known that this gave way in the face of "the phenomenon that was Napoleon." He asks how Goethe's vision of the "collaborative act of losing oneself in the ordered and active masses" can hope to occur if it isn't "under the control of the state and under a certain amount of despotism." Even the failed master from Weimar had none of our fearfulness, immersing himself shortly before he died in the radical ideas of the French socialist Saint-Simon. When Thomas Mann is asked by a Viennese correspondent if he doesn't share the opinion that western democracy is a "thousand times" preferable to forms of government in the east, the author replies succinctly, "Young man, allow me not to answer your question." The old Thomas

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mann and the young, who in the mid-1920s defended in *Paris Diary* the notion of a "benevolent dictatorship" because he already felt there was an "excess of parliamentary democracy and party mismanagement," are not completely dissimilar.

Still, throughout his entire life he kept his promise not to commit himself to one side or the other. He didn't become a communist. He liked having streets and buildings in the east named after him but wished officials there could have the tact not to expressly ask his permission. When public ceremonies were held, he would honor both Germanys with a visit. He no longer had any desire to live in either of them, preferring "admittedly solidly pro-American" Switzerland. He was struck favorably by the attentions West Germany's President Heuss paid him on the occasion of the Schiller festival in Stuttgart. In the east he was struck by something else, something which I could hardly detect any more during the final days of the GDR, and which today is described only in derisive terms: "I looked into faces. . .there is an ascetic seriousness in them, stern calm, resolve, a piety devoted to the improvement of the earthly. From a purely human standpoint it is hard to resist. It must be avoided if one hopes to truly hate it, if one hopes to wholly retain the pleasure of playing ideals off it, ideals which have so many times over already become hypocritical pretexts for selfish interests." He recognized that these same people were the only ones to agree wholeheartedly when he spoke of the "great traditions of bourgeois culture." Nevertheless, he protested every "communist surge," wanted to maintain "his position in complete freedom" in the middle of the "tragically divided world" and valued protection for both sides. Like Heine, the other ironist in the German language, he was convinced of the need for a new organic, socialist world, a planned and unified world. And just like Heine, he was frightened; he believed that "a great deal that is evil, what justice cannot suffer" would have to be pushed away before such a world could become "world-feasible."

This concept of "world-feasibility"—of coming to terms with what is not obvious, with, for example, such enigmas as the desire for "audacity in propriety," for "subjectivity reconciled to objectivity"—seems to come entirely from Goethe. The whole thing smacks of classicism, and he was aware early on how easily classicism can lead to a "moral simplification of the world and in the end, as a dire result of this simplification, to a 'strengthening of evil.'" His reference to "evil Germany," which he maintained was "good gone wrong," is a product of this classicist perspective, which loathes fragmentation and looks always for the roots. He had trouble getting Nietzsche out of his system, but we owe to the task—of rejecting the morally despicable and vaguely histrionic in favor of a dignified illumination and a "joyful dawning of consciousness"—as Wolfgang Harich puts it, the "most radical settling of accounts with the intellectual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decay that reached its nadir in Hitler's fascist Germany: *Doktor Faustus*. Who, if not Thomas Mann, has the authority to warn us today in the year of Earl Jünger's centennial, that "aestheticism paves the way to barbarism in the human soul"? In the end he pinpoints one of the greatest errors in Nietzschean thought, that it tries to rescue instinct from intellect: "As though it were necessary to defend life from the mind! As though the slightest danger exists that the earth could become too intellectual!"

And one might add: as though it were necessary today to pull the greats from their pedestals—Thomas Mann, for example. We emptied the pedestals long ago—we stand helpless before any form of mastery. Thomas Mann never hesitated to admire or praise. Of course, this requires a large measure of self-esteem. Already as a student in secondary school he defends Heine when a teacher wanted to honor the poet by extolling his goodness: "Heinrich Heine, my dear doctor, admired Napoleon although he was born a German, and he admired Luther although he wasn't a Protestant." He concludes by saying, "No, Heinrich Heine was not a good man, he was only a great man."

Thomas Mann responded with tireless patience to inquiries and letters from young and old, provided information and did not shrink from granting the highest praise. To the twenty year old Peter Hacks, then a student in Munich, he writes that it seems to him "that your dissertation [on the use of style in *Lotte in Weimar*] is probably the cleverest thing I have read about the book." But, he also responded politely to the most naïve queries, regardless of their source and expresses his surprise in his diary at his friend Hesse's "severity in his dealings with the people." On one of his birthdays he acknowledges that he, unlike many "public" people, doesn't retreat from a celebration: ". . .I believe one should acquiesce to life and do one's duty in it and celebrate festivities as they come." But he also could be suspicious of the communicative, worldly-wise and world-obsessed side of his genius. At seventy-five, after reading a biography of Luther, he remarks, "Erasmus; I fear that his role—dazzling, but satisfying no one—is akin to my own." Shortly thereafter he concludes "that the greatness of neither was an entirely happy greatness, neither Luther's nor that of Erasmus." And he adds, "I see the happy, the absolutely endearing ill Goethe, who was both Luther and Erasmus at once." If he was a successor to Goethe, he was one who knew his limits.

The end wasn't without some bitterness. Speaking through his alter ego, Tonio Kröger, he says that a good work emerges "only under the pressure of an awful life," that "he who lives, doesn't work." When one considers his existence, it seems that his theme of "art and life" often more closely resembled "art or life." As an old man he still demanded the utmost of himself, even if it was with an increasing lack of creative energy. Even

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in *Felix Krull*, which might have been a cheerful epilogue, he takes on the most delicate questions of art and complains that even in this "foolish nonsense" the tendency to degenerate into the "Faustian" once again crops up. Then, however, he realizes with resignation that Faust must be delivered to the world, "and yet I have so little world": a harsh summation of his writer's existence. He confesses to having no herculean creative genius; his gift was rather in his ability to give an ideational clarity to received thoughts, experiences and utterances which were playfully encircled by his humorously apropos formulations. "What is material? Material is found on the street," says his Goethe in the Goethe novel's long internal monologue. In fact, the later diaries have a certain similarity to the seventh chapter of *Lotte in Weimar*. They are a long internal monologue of the aged writer. And the entry of June 6, 1952 reads, "My seventy-seventh birthday. O truly wonderful life!"—we are witnessing his amazement at actually having made it so far. He could very possibly have met his end in the manner of Hanno Buddenbrook or at least during the difficult lung-cancer operation he had to undergo shortly after turning seventy. But just then he was in the middle of *Doktor Faustus*; dying was out of the question. Despite all this he never rid himself of the notion that "the world is leading him about by the nose." There are "too many embarrassing memories," with "glimpses of contentment in between." And when fighting breaks out in Korea: "Why shouldn't I perish? My life is lived out. It wasn't pleasant."

So he died as he had lived, committed to the extreme limit of the "world-feasible." The last words he spoke to his eldest daughter were an apology; because he was so weak, he unfortunately couldn't "agree to a visit just now." As the end drew near he exchanged a few witticisms with his doctor in French and English, and we smile—even at the end—when we see how the Goethe-successor has become the breezy modern. The last thing he uttered was the request that his glasses be brought to him.

His Goethe says to Lotte in Weimar that the spirit is the "higher guiding force," which meaningfully joins things together in art and life and which urges us to see "in everything sensory only the guise of higher relationships." "There is no coincidence in the unity of any meaningful life . . ." It seems to us he did everything he could not to hamper, not to work against the "higher guiding force."

Translated from the German by Ian Johnson

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JANKO POLIĆ KAMOV

Freedom

For eighteen years a terrible thought crept through my nature, my ideas and my feelings. I used to blanch and tremble, I was awe-stricken out of fear. Today I blanch and tremble and I am awe-stricken out of passion. My life is in full bloom: my temper is like that of a dog gone rabid from thirst. There is but one mood in my eyes and my soul, one will in my ideas and realizations, one feeling on my tongue and in my heart. If I were to commit a crime, I would not conceal it; if I commit it in my thoughts, I'll confess it. Everything inside me seeks an exit, strives for expression and finds it. I lose my temper quickly, unexpectedly, madly; when I quarrel, when I drink, when I make love, when I sing. One glass makes me drunk, one look drives me crazy, one phrase enraptures me. Everything is speed, moment and instinct. These two years are but a moment: spirituality without process, feeling without analysis. My nature is—opposition; my logic—indiscipline; my philosophy—revolution. Puberty! Everything is finally crushed: goodness, holiness and familiarity: a quarter of an hour's embracing and kissing renders more pleasure than all that which kept me home. At the bosom of the most lowly woman I forget my family, my upbringing and shame; and when I am at home, I only remember that I was able to forget at anybody's breast all that now surrounds me, traps me and makes me bitter. A drunken party exhilarates me as much as a woman; only with a hangover am I able to write poems. I do not distinguish between the grammar school student, the servant and the prostitute, nor between wine, beer and brandy. I drink to get drunk and to make love until I am full. In brief, I love everything that my father condemns. He is grave, sober and ethical. For him, life begins with marriage; for me, that is where it ends. He is enchanted by mildness, love, goodness: the New Testament; I am enchanted by passion, violence, crime: the Old Testament. His ideal is Christ the Redeemer; mine is Devil the Seducer. To him, a prostitute is loathsome; to me she is luxurious. He would say: the family is the reaction to a brothel; I would say—a brothel is the opposition to the family. In a word, I am an oppositionary, and he is a reactionary.

But we don't discuss it. When I am out all night drinking, he is taciturn, sullen and offended. I stay out a second night, and he is silent, he smiles and leaves. And a third night out would be too much. . . .I write poems, he writes memoirs. Our eyes rarely meet; we become confused and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both look down: he wants to say something to me, I want to say something to him. . . .He once said, "It is nice that you work and write poems, but losing your nights, that's not healthy." And I was upset: I can only write poems with a hangover. . . .I wrote, "I like Jews for their perversity is one of revolt, crime and sin; idealism begins with the first uprising of the angels, humanity with the institution of hell, life with the murder of Cain, and poetry with the discovery of Satan." If my father were to read this, he would praise my work, but would criticize the ideas, and yet all of my poetry of pleasure rebels against work.

For eighteen years a terrible thought crept. When was it that I first took notice of it? I suppose it was some years ago when I suddenly awoke in my bed and squeezed my eyes shut in front of my father who had come to wake me. He left immediately, and I suspected that he had found me out. He began to watch me more carefully since. Five years ago, I came home drunk and threw up the wine. My father said sternly, "This I forbid you, for it is not nice and it is harmful for you." Four years ago, in grammar school, I lit a cigarette in the street. My father, displeased, said "You smoke and moreover you are spiteful; and smoking is unhealthy, spite is a sign of malice and stupidity." So again he spoiled my fun. Three years ago my mother dismissed a maid on my account and my father did not speak to me for a week. He saw me in the company of a coquette and pretended not to see me. I did not want to see him. If he had said but one word of displeasure in the street, it would have been easier, I would have felt happier and more relaxed. But his silence spoiled the fun. At home he reprimanded me very seriously and peacefully (while I was still trembling from her kisses): "That is not a woman for you; she will corrupt you." The latter offended me. Disheartened, I turned away and thought: Why does he say anything to me when everything he says is a reaction to my nature, my ideals, my inclinations, and my nature is the opposition to all his advice, beliefs and wishes . . . .One time I slapped a schoolmate who had spoken ill of a young lady. My father kindly said (while my palm still itched): "It is nice of you to defend the honor of those who deserve it; but slapping someone is never honorable, for it humiliates both the slapper and the slapped." And again I turned away in anger, thinking: I defended a lady's honor only in order to slap the fellow, and in this too he has to spoil my fun. Too often my father went for walks with me and talked, but I walked and talked listlessly; but I had to conform to his will because he never said "you have to." And he would speak so kindly that it was difficult for me to contradict; he stated his beliefs so humbly that I could not dare to refute. Sometimes he would invite me for a beer, but already after the third glass he would say "enough," while I would have enjoyed only those that would follow. I drank the first few only to please him, and would only end up displeased with him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thus, due to the most insignificant daily events, I came to wish he wasn't there. Sometimes I considered running off into the world, but he wouldn't even give me the motive for that. Always kind, silent and peaceful, he indirectly suppressed my desires, my passions and instincts. And the more wanton I became, the more discontented and muffled I was in front of him. I kept quiet, with my tail between my legs. His politeness and soberness bothered me even more because they gave me no pretext for a harsh word or a more determined step. My openness and passion would disperse miserably in his presence. The tension of my rapture, my will, my blood constricted ever more aloofly and limply. Thus that thought crept; thus in his presence I was even more subdued; I followed him listlessly, listened to him unresponsively, replied dully. In front of him I acted affectedly, artificially and formally. And then that thought dug deeper into my soul. Calmly and coldly I would wish for him not to exist, to disappear, to be gone forever. And in so thinking, something light, wanton and joyful would smile inside me, around me, far from me. Like a prisoner gazing at a bright blue sky and thinking of freedom. His gray beard, his deep wrinkles and tired steps inspired such distant, blue and endless images. My eyes would fill with sighs, my back with tremors. In the long silence interrupted by our steps, the squeaking of sand, the rustle of leaves and his heavy breathing—something thick, luxurious and dreamy would gather on the horizon, in my soul and in my eyes. When we parted, he would leave slowly and gloomily, full of cigar smoke. And I ran to my Anka, squeezed her hands and listened to the sound of her wrists crackling. The thought crept no more. Surrounded by women and wine, I would raise my tail again. And there I felt that the thought was in my blood.

For eighteen years it crept. . . .Already in my childhood I would sometimes wish for the death of someone to whom my life had inextricably tied me. I would wish it out of some kind of curiosity, the same curiosity which drove me to watch women take off their clothes or push my finger into my neighbor's hose. But all the curiosities of a powerless child turned into a young man's powerful passion. Even today, when my father has for several months been ill with cancer, which is cured by death, I feel a rush of blood, tears and bile, and I make love, drink and sing furiously. Inside me, hatred, pain and pleasure are one: the wounds on my father's throat which leak soup, the pestilent breath of catarrh, pus and spoiled blood, my father's anger, ill temper and his sobs, my mother's worries, tears and reprimands, my mistress, the orgies and the thoughts—keep me in eternal ecstasy, passion and heat. When I approach my father, he is angry because I had left him alone; he is angry if I speak too loudly; he demands that I read the newspaper to him, then falls asleep after the third line, but awakes immediately if I stop. When he calls for me, I hide in my room. There I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

write poems, and my mother keeps peeking in and is shocked at my callousness and indifference. In front of my father, she defends me, in front of me, she defends my father. "You go around with bad women, you drink with vagrants, you laugh and write as if there is nothing wrong. And your father is dying. What will people say? You are disgracing both him and me and the honor of our family. And your father is dying."

Her refrain reverberates in the semi-darkness of my room and rings irritatingly in my ears. She used to dissuade me from my life like that before, jealous of the noisy charm of the world, saying: "What will your father say?" Now that the catarrh has destroyed my father's throat, she says: "What will people say?"

The house is filled with bile, malice and stench. If I am at home, I am not allowed to laugh, talk, read, eat. And if I leave, it's even worse. My mother fears my father and the world. She speaks of honor, love and respect. She calls to my mind the images of death, sables and mourning. The death of the head of the family fills her with apprehension: she even wrote to her brothers to come. Huge tears cover her glowing face and I get the impression that she is using my father's death for her purely maternal interests: the illness, she thinks, will make me always stay at home, her brothers will come, we shall all renounce our work, fun, inclinations and shall become a family of pain, unhappiness and closeness.

The sun is in the West. The last flames are melting through the drawn curtains. Glowing pieces of something invisible are falling on my head. Visions of molten metals, feelings and images are dancing in front of me. My eyes are hot, my throat is dry, my back on fire. I have torn apart several manuscripts.

This one thought is swirling, breaking and throwing me to and fro. The house is like a dungeon: dull, ill-humored, silent. My mother is the disciplinarian with her entertainment and threats. For eighteen years I was taught that the family is the only holy thing one must never mingle with. That was my father's law, his religion, his ethics: all that is good comes from it and returns to it. For eighteen years my father was forging chains so that in the moment when he lost his strength he would have slaves at his disposal.

All the while, Anka is waiting for me. My lover is fragrant with youth. Her black hair falls down her forehead like a liquid mixture of grease, jam and syrup. Her lips are hard and small like those of a Greek goddess. Her eyes are wide like a dyed peacock's. Her hands soft and warm as feathers. Her skirts cling to her body. Her shape is nervous, undecided. She promised to come to the woods tonight, with laughter on her lips, tears in her bosom and passion in her eyes. I promised to read my poems to her. I have turned all the dry and explosive matter of her female soul on fire. At noon I met

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her and looked at her in daylight on the hot pavement with a look that made me sweat and made her blush. She comes from an excellent family, slightly frightened and very innocent. But above all, she is reckless. She listens to my poems and understands nothing, but feels everything. They confuse her so much that she looks sleepy and lost.

"In you I love sin, and in sin I love you," I told her the other day in the park, while the sun was shining on the flowers and her hair, and her cheeks turned red from love, the summer, the fever and the vanity. Thus she loses her virginity in every touch of our knees, our breath, our lips. "I am the Devil," I always tell her when I want to flatter her. At dusk I squeeze her hand and she responds like an echo.

Anka is waiting for me. There is nothing gay in her youth nor charming in my love. The thought of my father and my mother, their senile interests, this house turned into a hospital in the dungeon—all that overemphasizes Anka, my passion and the wonders of the world. My thoughts are clear. The laws of life grow in me and from me. Death both explains and justifies. Why should I care about the consequences? Even the worst life is justified by death. My decision is clear, my problem is solved. My father shall die—Anka shall lose her virginity. . . .At that moment my mother called me to help her take my father to the bathroom. He held on desperately to our shoulders; his back hunched, his knees bent; he is digging his fingers into us. He is all sweat, groaning and stench. His lower lip is quivering and the whole room quivers with it. He leans on us. With this final longing of his body for life he has turned us into objects, mute matter, crutches. He does not realize that he is hurting us, he does not even think that this can hurt. He has no pity for us. He is treating us as if we were a handkerchief, crutches, socks. . .things he has bought for his needs. The yellow dressing on his wounds reaches to my nose. My senses are but rags to him.

We left him there and nearly closed the door. He is breathing hard and straining while his curses are lost in his catarrh. He keeps squeezing his eyes; his shoulders raised up to his ears. From the excessive pain, his body has become elastic. A young puppy peeks through the door and opens its mouth and eyes wide. The wrinkles in my mother's face have turned black. My father's gray hair is trembling; the space is filled with the stench of decay. Father can't do it. He's trying to force himself and becomes smaller; his chin hits his breasts; he is moaning, sweating and choking. His skinny, bony hands are beating his knees. I notice how much weight he has lost, how he is suffering and raging. The dressing on his wounds is smeared deep yellow. He can't do it. For the last time he desperately hits his knees and the dressing becomes wet. Blood is dripping on his shirt, his breasts and knees. I turn pale.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We take him to his bed. The smell of blood makes me dizzy; my father's eyes open and pierce my breast. This time, as an exception, I must change the dressing on his wounds. He closes his eyes. I uncover his throat: the two holes stare at me like two hollow eyes. Anka's image is bloodied in my thoughts; I think of her and my father's blood colors the image. Anka is bathed in blood, pain and terror.

It's getting dark. A spray of yellow blood dries on my fingers. Those two eyes now not only stare, but breathe. The thick, humid and greasy smell makes me sleepy, giddy and draws me closer. I just might fall onto my father's breast. A dog is whimpering in the hall; I don't know why. My mother whips it. The sharp blows echo from his soft, young and plump body. Those two eyes stare at me fixedly: I feel as though I were looking at hell. It smells of sulfur, burning and corpses. The smells daze me, the sounds irritate me; my father's face becomes a grimace, his lower lip large, white and dribbling.

Something terrible is building inside me: those smells, those colors, those sounds turn solid, rigid and, like an iron fist, they grab my throat, my breast, my heart. Everything is filled with matter: the sound of the blows, the smell of decay and the color of blood. My senses are filled with flesh, my images colored in blood. I don't know what I'm doing. It's like my father, my mother and myself are but a shapeless mass of flesh, like in a butcher's shop. Our feelings and thoughts are but a solution smelling of protoplasm, blood and garbage; our souls but a cesspool of carnal mass.

When I left his room, my mother was still scolding the dog. He had gotten into the bathroom and drunk my father's blood, licking the dirty stone even more passionately under her blows.

The sun set quite a while ago. I won't be on time. Anka must have already left. As I was leaving, my mother said beggingly: "Come back soon. He might pass away. I am all alone. God knows whether your aunt will come tonight. Return immediately."

Her eyewhites were gray.

We wired my brothers to come. Mother wanted me to write: "Father is dying." She is doing all she can to gather us all around the hearth. My brothers are coming. And they will join my mother in forcing me to stay at home and forget about Anka.

My senses are still filled with my father's blood, his wounds and the stench. The sounds of soft and greasy blows resound in my ears. Everything is driving me into my lover's arms. Right away, now, while I'm still full of sick smells and cruelty. My father was bending in my arms and I never thought it might be painful for him. Just like my back was bending under his fists and he hadn't thought it might hurt me. My mother beat the dog into a bloody pulp for drinking my father's blood. What a beauti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ful story to tell my lover! I am so very thirsty. I will scare her so badly that she will be terrified and die of anemia. My words will fear for her and drink her blood. Life is a bloodsucker.

The forest is black. The lamp throws feeble light; the dusty path, like a night ghost, white between the dense layers of trees and darkness. Even the powerless sky expects a crime. Oh, to look at her now! In her white dress! And to bloody the whiteness of her clothes, her soul and her youth.

And she's not there. She doesn't answer my calls. In vain! I called, I looked, I yelled. The darkness swallowed my voice and my gaze. If I could only find her now. Now, that she has made me so irritable, so angry, now that she has provoked me. Now, in the solitude and darkness. Now that my father has set me on fire, has warmed my blood. To whom would I answer for my crime? Not to my father, he is dying. Where would the crime lead me? Certainly not home.

I walked down the main street looking for her. I walked to her windows. There she is, at the window. Will she come down? She apologizes. We walk down the long tree-lined path. She is chatting away. I'm not listening. We go farther and farther, where there is less light, fewer lamps.

How many times I could not decide on such a step: to seduce an excellent girl and a virgin with only one goal—to leave her. Consideration and respect for human virtue was nothing but the belittling and despising of my nature and my beliefs. My upbringing was in that case stronger than my instincts; my family stronger than my individuality. All of it—my father's horrible nets. His goodness, politeness and kindness prevented me from such a step, which in his eyes would be evil, vulgar and criminal. But his dribbling, large, white lips, the holes in his throat, the stench of blood and flesh, the desperate, unconscious, animal grip of his hands—his inconsideration of my senses, disrespect of my feelings and belittling of my literary work—had not all of that finally set me free? My good, nice and kind father uncovers himself in front of his youngest son and allows with a clear conscience his youngest child to touch with his eyes, his nose and his fingers the ugliness and crudeness of the body.

I come to and look at Anka. She brought me back. I squeeze her hand angrily.

"Where are you going?" (She resists.) "Why are you going back?" She looks at me suspiciously and retreats:

"You have been so quiet. You are so rude today."

"Forgive me. I was lost in thought. My father is dying. What I said was stupid." She was surprised:

"And you, you left your father." I hated her with a vengeance. I took her hands and whispered:

"Shut up. Shut up. Not a word. Because of you. You understand."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I drag her to the side. She resists. She's crying. Her wrists are breaking. "Your father! Your father!"

The forces desert me. I hated my father. I wished he would die. Anka's words are full of venom and narcosis. She goes back. I lag behind. I don't know whether I walked Anka home. I'm hurrying somewhere, pushing and stumbling. Nobody wants to tell me I'm being rude. And that's all I'm waiting for. I understand nothing but my anger. I can't justify anything but my absurd desire for somebody to call me rude. I went into a brothel. Zora is inviting me to her room. The passion has frozen inside me. I drown it in beer and then we went up. I offered her a lot of money. She lay on her stomach. We are both suffering. It's the first time that she can feel the pain of a man. . . .But I fall on her back omnipotently and sob. I'm disgusted with myself. I can do anything I want with her. . .while what I wanted to do out of spite and anger. . .I couldn't. . . .My freedom has to be purchased. I went looking for it in a brothel, among slaves. . . .I left.

The lamps, the stars and the lighted windows tire my eyes. I'm struggling to find a thought, but I find only sweat, noise and melancholy. What is this now? I see this afternoon and the ecstasy of my senses. A great sigh of pleasure and freedom penetrates the forest, the skies and the images of my fantasy. A bloody breath comes from my father's body and falls, thickened, onto the whiteness of my love. I know, what I can do. Dew is glittering on the flowers, the leaves and the grass, and the big, icy scythe of death ravages the meadows. Why don't I murder Anka? My words drank all my blood!

Can I go home now? Something huge was inside me and it wanted out. And now it seemed as if it had been nothing, and as if there is nothing inside me. I call my verses, the visions of my imagination, the illusions of my images for help. The house stopped enchanting me so long ago—the brothel profaned freedom. And there I could do what I wanted to. . .something unnatural—out of spite, anger, curiosity. But what I wanted, I could not do.

The night is falling down a steep cliff. Our earth is an abyss. The whole lighted city looks like a hole filled with flies and worms. The sky is also a hole, a starry one. And wherever I look, I see holes. My sighs linger around the hole, which is humid, dark and endless.

Last night I came home a bit drunk, but fully aware. I threw up in the bathroom. My mother poured water and tears on me. I said:

"I have been drinking. Why did you let me change the dressing on father's wounds? Why did I have to see his wounds?" I drank out of desperation. I was disgusted, so I drank. I drank and got sick again.

I stayed at home today. That brandy should harm me bothers me more than everything else. It is a disaster in my age, like being impotent with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

naked woman. It shames me. I would be totally destroyed if my mates were to find out about it: I was always so proud of the fact that I can hold my liquor.

I am helping my mother, taking care of my father ever so kindly, quietly and humbly. My father looks at me now and then and his gaze remains as if it were written in the air. The sun is sneaking through the window and the red rays slide down the wooden floor lustfully, reaching the polished bed. Father would like to say something, but he immediately lowers his head, his lips and eyelashes sadly. All the while, the sun keeps merrily sliding through the sky and over the floor, down my hangover and my sad thoughts.

I think I have managed to convince even myself that it wasn't the brandy that harmed me. My aunt arrived and I kissed her hand three times. I saw the milkmaid to the door and in my thoughts I kissed her blond hair and healthy blush of her cheeks and shawl. I peek through the window and the people passing by leave a pleasant sense of movement. A girl appears from the neighboring house and laughs at my gazes. I stare at her, and her teeth remain white anyway.

I forget about Anka. I become more quiet, considerate and sly. Now my mother thinks I'm an excessively sensitive and dutiful son. I have convinced her and shall convince her. It would be awful if she were only to think that brandy could have harmed me. That would be a great argument for her to fight against my binges, babbling in front of my friends.

Today after lunch a sadness came over me and I fell asleep in my chair. In this half-dream I saw my father mysteriously beckoning me to follow him. He was smiling sadly and mockingly and was pointing to the sea, the islands and the dusk. Then he left, waving good-bye.

When I woke up, I thought about the dream, for I could find no connection or interpretation in the context of what was happening. Now even my dream makes me think when I'm awake. It was so simple and melancholic. The large, gray and dead sea; the islands like frozen ships on which everything living had died, except for a dog which announces the death of its masters like a bell. This dead and gray landscape touches me deeply. A great sense of peace descends on my soul. I am amazed that throwing up had destroyed and shamed me, while all my father's and mother's suffering and my criminal thoughts had elevated and warmed me. Through this silence of my soul and surroundings I understand only too clearly what the chains were, the ones my father forged and what the freedom that my being demanded. In my father's presence I could feel everything but instinct; in front of him all my thoughts, feeling—and limbs—would droop impotently. Goodness, kindness and politeness were irreconcilable with the essence of my youth. The feeling of embarrassment and sexual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impotence would grow from the very thought of my father, who might find out about my adventures and speak to me about them. And his daily presence, the looks and conversations were only the prevention and destruction of the growth and flourishing of my idea, which could flow out and away only far from him. Furthermore, I could not even tell my father that this was what I needed, let alone ask him about his youth. Thus all our conversations would anxiously evade the subject which may have been my only crucial question and the reason for our animosity. And when I saw him ill, powerless and degenerated, my thought that had crept for eighteen years and was keeping its tail between its legs suddenly elevated my whole being, from head to foot.

It is amazing; it stupefies me and makes me think; I believe I should sooner miss my father's funeral than a date. And I'm not fighting this feeling, but neither does it enchant me like it did yesterday. And this thing, so amazing when I think about it, becomes so natural, when I begin to feel.

Nor am I ashamed that it is improper, shameful and criminal; that it is beastly, savage and total corruption. There is no fight between good and evil in me now, but right now evil doesn't fascinate me either. That vomiting that had destroyed me, shamed me and given me a bad conscience makes all my enchantment a naïve illusion. And I believe that even my father would laugh sadly and mockingly about it, just like he did about that dead landscape. At the verge of death—what is it all to him? His advice, my mother's tears, my vomiting.

"His breathing is heavy," my mother whispered. I felt her hands on my back and we both shivered. "He wanted Auntie to leave the room. Your brothers are coming tonight, but he's only asking for you."

I went out slowly. My mother's unusual voice confused and frightened me. I thought of meeting my father's gaze.

The sun is yellow and the west is bathed in thick light. The windowpanes reflect colors like lighted candles in a mirror. I am overcome by curiosity: my father is asking for me. What will he say to me? What does he want to tell me? I'll kiss his hand, if he is dying.

Everything around me tells me that something holy, great and ordinary is happening. The dog lies under the table and the flies have stopped buzzing.

My mother touched my sleeve, then kissed me. My eyes filled with tears. I feel as if moths were buzzing in both orifices, and maggots were lazily crawling along my bones. I enter my father's room very curiously. There are just the three of us. He is going to say something, I think, and I wait silently. This great silence really does convey something great, holy and magnificent. Mother and I wait patiently. Father speaks only through motion: would I close the door? We close it. Could we raise him up a lit-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tle? He points to the bedside cabinet: a book? his rosary? I don't understand. I look to my mother. She understands immediately and puts the chamber pot on the bed. But father is speaking: Does he want to get off the bed? Yes. We lift him to his feet. I put the chamber pot under him. I never even think: Is this what he wanted to tell me? My father is standing upright, he looks taller. But suddenly—I stepped back. My mother caught him with her last strength. His eyes open so terribly like they want to speak. A short, surprised, uncomprehending look and my father drops dead on his bed.

For the next half hour my mother, my aunt and I argue. Auntie called the priest and I said I would throw him out. I begin to feel that it is upon me to defend the beliefs and the honor of my father. Auntie is in a congregation. She says it is upon her to protect the reputation of the family. She is very angry, probably because father had her sent out of the room and because the last wish of the deceased was a chamber pot, not the holy sacrament. I see clearly how she would like to influence our family, to have some rights; at least, to take her share. There is so much lust and interest in her arguments that I feel she is infringing on my birthright. Mother keeps crying and is more upset that I won't allow the priest to come than that father died. We left the dead one alone. My aunt is shouting at the top of her voice that she will not do a thing, that she will not move before the priest arrives. She even tried to throw me out: I had profaned the deceased, I was drinking while he was dying; I was ashamed of my own father when I was in the company of bad women. Only now did I begin to feel a deep love for my father and in arguing with my aunt I came to believe that I had loved him more than anybody else.

"He asked for me"—I say maliciously—"and didn't even mention you." That pleases my mother too. She approves, she comes to life: the dead man had brought the son back to the family. She kisses me passionately, she cries and takes me to my father's room.

"He is ours," I feel as if my mother is saying. "He's mine," I seem to reply triumphantly. "We shall see," my aunt seems to whisper sarcastically. And the growing silence, the malice that cannot speak, the interests always hard at work—develop a silent battle about a corpse, and each of us flatters his egotism; we remember that we have some beliefs and principles which we want to, which we must express around a body that has already started to smell.

Something new appears inside me. With my father's decay I begin to feel an ever more passionate love for him. The self-respect, the imperative tone, my aunt's impertinent showing-off waken my duties as a son, my rights and feeling and my youthful nature of decisiveness, energy and defiance. I went to the coroner, to the undertaker's, I wired our relatives, and in a quarter of an hour I took care of everything and returned full of energy, passion and strength—just to show that I was master around here.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Entering the apartment, I ran into a monk; I hurried to the door, waited for him and told him:

"He didn't ask for you."

My aunt opens the door. The monk is smiling. I'm ready to push him down the stairs, but he says he has been asked to come. I let him pass and say behind his back:

"All right, you might as well come in. The dead belong to you, but while he was alive, he believed in god, but not in priests; and monks he detested, because he was industrious, worldly and ethical."

But my aunt deafened my words.

The new feeling is growing and developing inside me. The very fact that the priest came despite my protests—the fact that things went the way my aunt wanted them—provokes my youthful vanity, honor and temper. For the first time in my life I feel that I have beliefs which I must affirm as consistently as possible. What's more, the role of my father's defender delights me.

My aunt said: "you were drinking while he was dying and yet you now want to defend his honor." She wants to disarm me. And can I really talk of ethics? Can I show that my words are—pure defiance. My aunt has also concealed her desire to rule, to advise and to protect under the veil of religion. Am I just concealing my defiance as principles? It seems to me that my defiance actually is turning into—principles. So many words come to my lips, so much passion in my heart, so many ideas in my mind.

The coroner arrives. He examines and concludes. I am at his service. I take him to my room so he can wash, I give him a clean towel, hand him his hat; I bow and see him to the door. Thanking him for everything, on everybody's account. My eighteen years enjoy the politeness no end, the talking of important matters, with the proper posture and excellent person, and provokingly and at the same time politely I showed my aunt: I was as polite to the coroner as I was with the monk. I received the coroner with more respect than she showed the priest. Indeed. And I am necessary in the family and in this grave occasion. Even more than that. In receiving the coroner I felt like I was bringing into the house an opposition to the reactionary, to the ignorance and—to my aunt, who, next to my father's ear, had spit out all those insults and slander of his son. And I was the only child who had been with him. My brothers are arriving now. I can hear the ear. It's them!

How my head feels enlightened. How the horizon is clearing, the duty and my thoughts. For eighteen years a thought. . . .And I had kept my tail between my legs. But now there is no tail.

I began to feel flattered by playing the role of a grown man: even though I was the youngest, I will be the one to talk of my father's illness,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his suffering and his life with understanding and experience. For my brothers were absent, and my mother knows nothing of politics, literature or medicine.

Yes. It is them. My brothers will weep. I will comfort them, I will say: It's better this way. If you had witnessed his suffering, you would feel better now. It's easy for you to mourn and weep now.

Yes, it is them. The first and the second. The third one couldn't make it. He's abroad. I forbid my mother to go to meet them. You will cry, I said, and that will only make it worse for them. And I was thinking, I shall explain to them. Nicely, quietly, soberly. There is so much kindness, goodness and politeness in my every move, thought and word. To protect my father and comfort my brothers! Ah! What a magnificent image of the deceased arose in my mind. My brothers won't understand it; they hadn't seen him. But me! I saw two holes through which soup poured out; in the bathroom he had tried to force himself so fiercely that a stream of blood fell to the floor and the dog drank father's blood, while I was looking at the two holes through which hell came pouring out. And what will they be able to tell me about? There they are, hesitating: they don't dare come in; they've already lost courage! And what would they have done had they faced what I faced? What will they tell me about? Drinking, women, vomiting. But about cancer, about cancer, about cancer! About decomposing, decay, holes! And what is all the pleasure in the world compared to one moment of terror!

Oh, my brothers. My brother, come into my arms! Take courage.

My brothers notice that I have grown in the year they haven't seen me. I talk self-confidently and I choose my words. I explain in detail how the illness developed; how the catarrh choked my father and how that had finished him off. How cancer has remained incurable and unexplained to this day. What's more, today while everyone was sleeping, I took "Home Medicine" and carefully read the passage on cancer several times. Cancer is intensified by psychological suffering, the writer says. Cancer is hereditary, he goes on to say. That's very important to me. Now I can talk about the disease with more understanding and can make my father's image more grandiose. In front of my brothers I stress his liberal beliefs, his education, the spiritual battles of the *pater familias*, the clash between the problems of freedom and discipline in raising the children. I explain his tragedy: such a kind, good and polite man, and he had to die of the harshest disease, uncovered in front of his son like Noah; he, a man of ideals, to have a chamber pot for his last wish.

My brothers look at me with respect and delight while I go on and on praising the deceased. Finally I add:

"His illness was so unexpected and illogical like *deus ex machina* arriving in our modern tragedy to untie the knot with illness and death."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And with these words, which make me more important, I commemorate my father and enjoy the respect gained with my commemoration.

My brothers are silent. They are not writers. I feel I am the most extinguished person in the house now. They had me write the short obituary for the newspaper. I wrote the letters for our relatives. They only signed them. Even my aunt gave consent to that.

I am alone. The funeral is tomorrow. Accidentally I think of Anka. And immediately a dark thought comes: tomorrow I shall have to walk behind my father's coffin dressed in black. What would happen if I were to refuse?

That spoils my mood. I have always made fun of all formalities; if I now consent to them, I shall be mocking myself. That worries me so much that I descend from the heights to which I had risen. Again I am upset, I sweat and suffer: what will my friends say? Once we made fun of a friend who inherited a lot of money from his father, paid for our wine and wore a black band around his sleeve. "It's because of others"—he tried to justify himself. I was the first to attack this justification which was really a condemnation.

"How can a tradition, a lore with no significance, which only has significance in vulgarity, dictate who is qualified for our weddings—the priest! How can a ridiculous formality dictate how we are to behave, how to act—how can it rule our souls and minds? We comply with tradition because it is insignificant; but we feel no shame that insignificant things play such a major role in our lives, because we ourselves have become formal, vulgar, worthless. . . ."

And he replied:

"You only talk that way because you have as yet had no opportunity to fight formality."

"Your wedding will be the first!"

"I shall not marry."

"Your exams the second."

"That has a practical purpose."

"The third shall be death!"

"We shall see." (My blood was hot from the wine.) "Besides, if anyone in my family dies, I will be neither sorry nor glad. . . .My father will leave me nothing so I won't be able to afford mourning clothes."

Thus we argued drunkenly and insulted our benefactor in the name of principle.

That stupid drunken brawl seems even more stupid now and upsets me more. I fruitlessly try to capture the peace I felt this morning, the seriousness, importance and propriety. Neither the dream of my father smiling mockingly, nor the vomiting which has turned me noble overnight, nor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my father's last wish which I expected with fear and curiosity, nor the fight with my aunt about the deceased can divert me from this mood, lighten it and make any importance given to trifles just an illusion.

In vain do I try to think of Anka. A terrible thought attacks me again, the thought that had lost its tail with my father's death. This thought is the more enchanting because it contains an endless curiosity. How would it be if I were alone, all alone? And all the spasms of my nerves bounce off like waves—off my mother. . . .

Clouds are heavy in the sky. The house is full of guests. They called me, but I couldn't part with this haunting solitude so suddenly. My mother and aunt must be weeping; my brothers are entertaining the ladies. I recognized the voices of three girls from the neighborhood, three naughty and merry brunettes. Strange! I could not stand female company now. I would be ashamed to show sorrow; and if I were to act merry, I'm afraid I might offend. And that's consideration!

I am again plagued by the question of mourning blackness. That too is consideration: double consideration! Consideration of traditions represented by my mother and of my principles acquired with my friends over a glass of wine. It is uncanny: my own principles torture me, retreat, fail upon me and retreat once more. But they do not carry me off: they do not delight me anymore. So, before I would sooner have missed a funeral than a date! And now I couldn't go to the funeral in anything but a black suit! I don't feel like opposing my mother's wishes. The thought of women quickly weakens the seriousness I had maintained since the arrival of the priest and which I decided to maintain at any price throughout the funeral. Beauty, charm, lust, fragrances, looks and clothes fill me with passion, and now it requires my principles—the principles which are expressed by sobriety, peace and dignity. What a naïve reply it would be to say: "I'm not wearing black because it is against my principles!" As naïve as the believers who do penance after confession look in the eyes of both believers and non-believers. It was enough for me to hear female voices and my principles have become just as naïve—like penance, like. . .the black suit. The black suit is my mother's principle, but also the tradition, like greeting someone with "How do you do," which nobody takes as a real, literal question. And not saying it reeks of savageness and stupidity. Finally, a patriotic duel and a drunken party delight more than moving, voting, making presents or petty work.

What am I being liberated from?

Wasn't I enchanted with atheism, freedom, revolution because of my temper and my age? Principles! Wherever did I acquire them? Over a glass of wine, during demonstrations, in the coarsest intercourse. Wherever I smashed things, yelled or kissed. And isn't that precisely what my father condemned and what humiliated me in his presence?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What did I liberate myself from?

My mother is still here. I get rid of my principles, but not of kisses, wine and rousing. No, there is absolutely no reason not to consent to my mother's wish.

It's better to keep quiet. All that is coming—the funeral, the mass, the black suit—is so trivial that I am truly ashamed that my youth of revolution, passion and pleasure has anything to do with it. Truly: my father's death was my secret, my thought and sigh. Father was an obstacle to my feelings, thoughts and movements. He was a rein constraining me, and— unwillingly—a whip which drove me. The fact that I never discussed my writing with him the way I discussed it with enemies—that fact alone was a deep and crushing reason of our estrangement. And the slackening of my passions in his presence was more than a rein and a whip—it was a chain.

For eighteen years I embellished my secret of which I only spoke when drunk. This strange, passionate and elementary thought passed from abstraction into reality and so my father's death became freedom. And only thus could it delight me without a bad conscience and become a sigh, desire, instinct—of which I did not have to be ashamed, just like I didn't have to be ashamed of my beliefs and needs. All the nakedness was covered: My father's death is only a criminal thought, a tragic idea.

And while my thought thus covered, embellished and painted itself compressed into one abstract word—*freedom*—there was so much impudence, energy and greatness in it. And every step towards death was a step towards freedom; and each step away from death was a step away from freedom.

And the very realization of an ideal? And freedom itself? What has been written in my spiritual history these last three days? Reality writes: the chamber pot, the priest, the funeral, wreaths, the mass; and my soul remembers: visions, the horror of sin and crime, the bad conscience about vomiting, insisting on my principles out of defiance, praising my father out of egotism and vanity and consenting to formalities out of the fear of naïveté.

Feelings ever more vulgar, behavior ever more polite and thoughts ever more trivial.

No, I can't even think anymore. In vain I try to find something to delight me. Only those distant thoughts and unclear visions of other chains; my mother's strong desire that I should wear my black suit, my friends who will remind me of my principles, my opposition to the traditions, my passion to seduce women and have them like me. All these thoughts of all the chains around me and in me are so distant, so absurd that freedom becomes concrete in the death of everyone including myself.

Why did I begin to analyze myself? Why contemplate? Why express my ego? The contents are so pale, so feeble, so mundane, so impotent, cowardly and listless.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I cannot draw one conclusion out of all this! One idea! One feeling! One belief! One decision!

Analysis has made me distracted, lost, impotent and confused. At the funeral I walked as properly, normally and mechanically like everyone else, even though I felt so distracted and lost. Those steps still resound in my ears; they resound to eternity. If I think of the future and if I remember the past.

I wander through the wood. It is getting dark. My brothers are gone. My mother invited my aunt to stay with her. Leaves are rustling. The path is white. The lamps are shining. Stars are emerging in the sky. I search for forgetfulness and a synthesis. The warm summer night is creeping through the branches, through my senses, through my disappointed youth, and I think of Anka. I go to the brothel again. Again I get color in my cheeks, I come to life and become stronger. Synthesis is in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is in passion.

I'm holding Zora and in my fervor I pretend to be holding Anka.

No, tonight I am not going home. My house is here, where there are no considerations, no uneasiness and bad conscience.

My body is flourishing. My energy solidifying. My ego synthesizing.

It only costs ten crowns, but is worth the whole dowry and beauty of my beloved.

No, I'm not going home.

Seven in the morning. My knees are giving in. My youth is dying. I'll sleep like the dead. Sleep too is both forgetfulness and synthesis. The red and rising morning sun reflects off me just like the setting sun reflected the lighted death candles off the window.

I had a few glasses of plum brandy. I'll sleep even deeper and longer. All my youth shall pass in forgetfulness, passion and sleep; and if I grow old, I shall give advice to my children.

Translated from the Croatian by Ljiljana Sćurić

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

Despite persistent rumors that installations, multimedia, and conceptually-based art are all that's worth paying attention to at the end of the 1990s, the fall season in New York offered plenty of evidence that we needn't write obituaries for painting and sculpture just yet. Quite the contrary; they appear to be flourishing. The inaugural exhibition at Elizabeth Harris Gallery's new Chelsea space made the point clearly. Entitled *Alive and Well: New Painting*, it brought together twenty younger artists, linked by their belief in the expressive possibilities of putting pigment on a flat surface. Some were emerging talents beginning to establish their reputations, while others were newer to the art scene—"about to have their first solo shows," the press release said. Their work ranged from deadpan realism to brushy abstraction and just about everything in between. Most works were modest in size, as is common these days, but otherwise, diversity was the rule. (A French painter acquaintance insists that small scale is a political declaration, not an aesthetic or practical decision. She prides herself, she says, on refusing "to pollute the planet" with large paintings; of course, she makes a *great* many small pictures and smokes heavily, but. . .)

Some of the artists at Elizabeth Harris explored more familiar territory than others, but on the whole, their work was serious, ambitious, and often, of a high level—enough to reassure anyone interested in painting of its continued good health. Among the most memorable works was Bill Smart's generously-scaled, sleek abstraction, a flesh-pink disc, interrupted by smaller white discs, looming against a square white ground. At first, the painting seemed straightforward and comprehensible, but the tense imbalance of its geometric shapes soon became evident, so that the apparently harmonious, seemingly static picture revealed itself as unstable and absorbing—a sort of Pop Zen experience. Jane Schiowitz's small canvas deploying a casually drawn grid, rather like a stretched fishnet against a loosely brushed burnt sienna ground, also made its presence felt. The image was not particularly unexpected, but Schiowitz's subtle modulation of surface and her emphasis on process in the form of visible pentimenti, blurring, and color shifts within her fluent drawing made the little picture engaging and rewarding. Julian Hatton's vigorously brushed, loose-jointed landscape, with its saturated hues and exuberant evocation of growth and light—oddly reminiscent of both German Expressionism and the early years of American modernism—was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a surprise. So was, for wholly different reasons, Peter Acheson's *Tree at the Top of the World*, which flirted with a good many present day clichés—the childlike image, tiny size, crude paint application—but somehow managed to be personal and convincing, largely because of its inventive shapes. At the other end of the spectrum from Acheson's deliberately rough little picture was Hiroshi Sugito's large, suave, pastel-toned canvas punctuated with fragile pencil drawing. The incipient sweetness of the picture was subverted by its spatial implications—a flattened proscenium-like enclosure with swooping orange curtains—and its oddball, albeit rather familiar protagonist—a clunky, one-eyed monster cross-bred from late Guston and the comics. Happily, the delicacy of Sugito's touch and the elegance of his washes compensated for the slight predictability of his imagery. *Alive and Well* was a useful survey, but because each participant was represented by a single work, it was also frustrating. Fortunately, I'm told that there will be opportunities to see more of what some of these promising young artists can do at Elizabeth Harris as the season progresses.

It was probably fortuitous, but provocative, that *Alive and Well* overlapped with Thomas Nozkowski's show of recent paintings at Max Protech, since Nozkowski's cranky, thoughtful pictures are models of the kind of pictorial inquiry to which many of today's younger painters—including many in the Elizabeth Harris show—aspire. He seems to strive to reduce painting to its most fundamental components without jettisoning completely the narrative or spatial allusions discarded by early modernism. Nozkowski has no single way of making a picture, no single conception of how pictorial space functions, and apparently, no limit to the ambiguous configurations he distills from a host of sources, yet in spite of all these possible variables, his clenched, densely-stroked paintings remain distinctive; his rigorous pictorial intelligence always comes through. I was most struck by a weird picture of a woolly, white, saddle-like shape, floating against a luminous ground and anchored by multicolored strokes. The effect was rather like one of those vivid, decontextualized childhood memories—an image seared into one's consciousness without being understood at the time, still potent but distorted in scale and meaning because of that lack of understanding.

Uptown, at Jason McCoy, Cora Cohen's recent paintings announced the robust condition of a quite different conception of picture-making. I've been interested for some time in Cohen's curious amalgam of detachment and passionate conviction in her stained and splashed canvases. Often it seems that she has discovered, rather than willed, her pictures. The most extreme can read simply as artifacts of her process: uncensored emblems of the studio, which at the same time revel in the fluidity and seductiveness of paint—Frankenthaler with postmodern irony, I suppose. At McCoy, I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

found Cohen's smaller, darker, more deliberately worked pictures to be more convincing than her large, lyrical efforts. The bigger paintings seemed rather arbitrary, their component gestures too finicky to sustain their energy across the whole expanse, while the intense smaller pictures were more rhythmically coherent and the scale of their marks more satisfying. Those qualities, along with their greater physical density, made them some of Cohen's strongest works to date.

Cohen is not unique, of course, in conceiving of painting as a process of courting spontaneity, of "getting out of your own way," as Larry Poons has put it, in order to allow the materials of painting somehow to become charged with the artist's emotional and intellectual baggage. This attitude fueled the practice of generations of Cohen's ancestors, Poons included, from the Abstract Expressionists to the present; witness, for example, Pollock's pours or Poons's thrown paintings of the 1970s and 1980s. (The miracle, of course, is that the skeins and waterfalls of paint and the miscellaneous accretions that punctuate Pollock's and Poons's pictures *do* end up being expressive and capable of moving us.)

Poons's fundamental assumptions about what a picture can be have remained unchanged over the years, but his paintings haven't. As his last show made clear, he has increasingly allowed all kinds of things to surface in his recent work that he previously suppressed or ignored—boldly colored, contained shapes; deliberate drawing gestures; fleeting references to things seen; allusions to landscape, and more—as though he had simply decided to put in everything that interested him, without editing. Recently, he has explored these ideas in monotype, a medium whose directness permits him to preserve the immediacy of his usual process and, because of the transforming properties of printing, adds yet another element of the unforeseen. The results, shown at Claudia Carr Gallery, were a mixed bag, but the best were fresh, energetic images in which seemingly allusive imagery dissolved into nondescriptive internal rhythms and all-over abstract structures; when the hints of illusionistic reference became too obvious, the monotypes suffered. In some, slashing strokes and a palette of clear red, blue, yellow, and green conspired to suggest outdoor space without describing it literally, rather in the way that a 1940s Hofmann landscape does. Others were more subdued, evoking (as much through their scale as through reference) the tabletop world of the still life, although they were no more literal than the "landscapes." The small monotype format sometimes seems to cramp Poons's style, as though this master of the vast canvas had trouble translating full body gestures into movements of the wrist, but he is clearly fascinated and challenged by the possibilities of this new medium. I am eager to see where it takes him.

Among the fall season's more *recherché* treats were Robert Natkin's recent abstractions at Reece Galleries and Bob Thompson's *Heros, Martyrs,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Monotype (1992) by Larry Poons. 30 inches by 23 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Claudia Carr Gallery.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

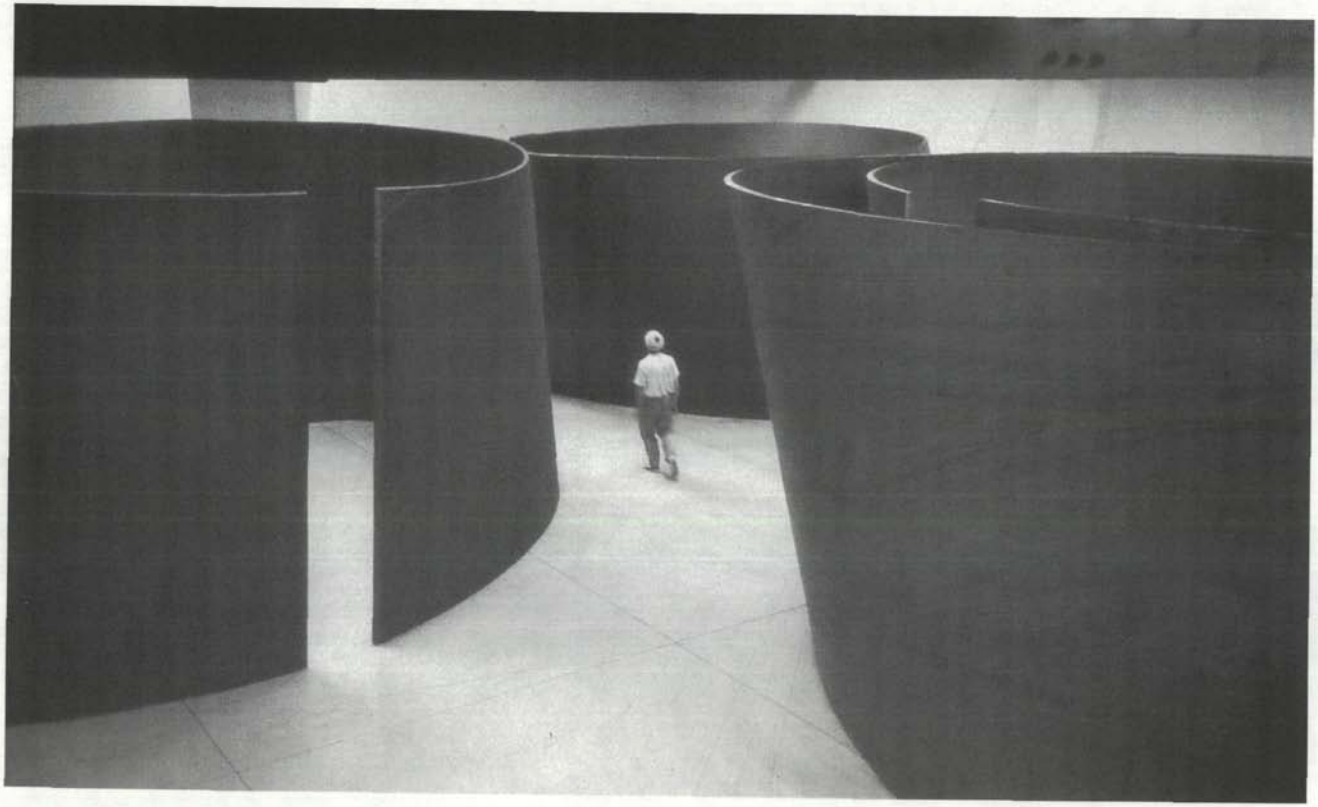
and Spectres at Michael Rosenfeld, since neither painter's work has been seen with any frequency in the past few years. Natkin's dreamy, quirky pictures rang changes on his habitual cast of characters: the blunted rectangles, thickened letter-like shapes, and soft-edged forms that float and jostle one another in the flickering, dotted atmosphere of his canvases. Klee and the movies inform these paintings almost equally. Natkin distills from one a sense of material expressiveness and from the other, an illusion of instability and pulsing motion. I've thought for some time that he's best when he simplifies and scales up his dappled marks so that they read as pictorial events, not just as texture or pattern, and two of the strongest works in the show, a large, tawny brown canvas and a creamy picture that seemed to blow a stack of Hofmann-like rectangles into mid-air, confirmed my impression. I was less taken with an ambitious series of small Stations of the Cross, since the specifics of the narrative turned Natkin's lively shapes into cartoon-like characters—an outlined cruciform, capable of bending like a naturalistically rendered figure, was flagellated, crowned with thorns and all the rest of it. But whatever my reservations about individual works, Natkin's wit and his masterly ability to turn paint into something luminous and intensely pleasurable to contemplate reverberated through the show.

There have been promises of a full-scale Bob Thompson retrospective for some years, tantalizing those of us who have long been interested in the work of this prodigiously talented, self-destructive, all-too-short-lived African-American painter. Apparently we don't have much longer to wait, but in the meantime, the survey at Michael Rosenfeld was a welcome opportunity to see some important pictures, along with more modest works that documented Thompson's evolution—not that he had all that long to evolve, since he died in Rome in 1966, just short of his 29th birthday; his career as a full-time painter spanned a mere eight years.

But as the recent show made clear, Thompson was a natural storyteller who quickly found his voice, rapidly developing a language of brilliant, saturated hues, thick strokes, and blocky structures, and marshalling a cast of schematic characters, both human and fantastic, to enact his private dramas. There are echoes of German Expressionism throughout Thompson's work and even stronger echoes of a German-born painter closer to his own generation, the visionary Jan Müller. Yet whatever its relation to its antecedents, a picture like *The Tree*, 1962, with its gutsy silhouettes, its Matissean play of a flat red shape against an expanse of black loosely brushed over red, and its flattened figures, unconstrained by gravity, is a pretty remarkable achievement for a twenty-five year old.

Thompson's best works marry firm abstract structure to haunting, otherworldly imagery almost drowned by juicy paint; his weakest are his most literal. Like many American painters in Europe for the first time, he was hit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Torqued Ellipses (1997) by Richard Serra. Cor-Ten steel. Installation View.
Photo by Allen Glatter. Courtesy of Dia Center for the Arts.

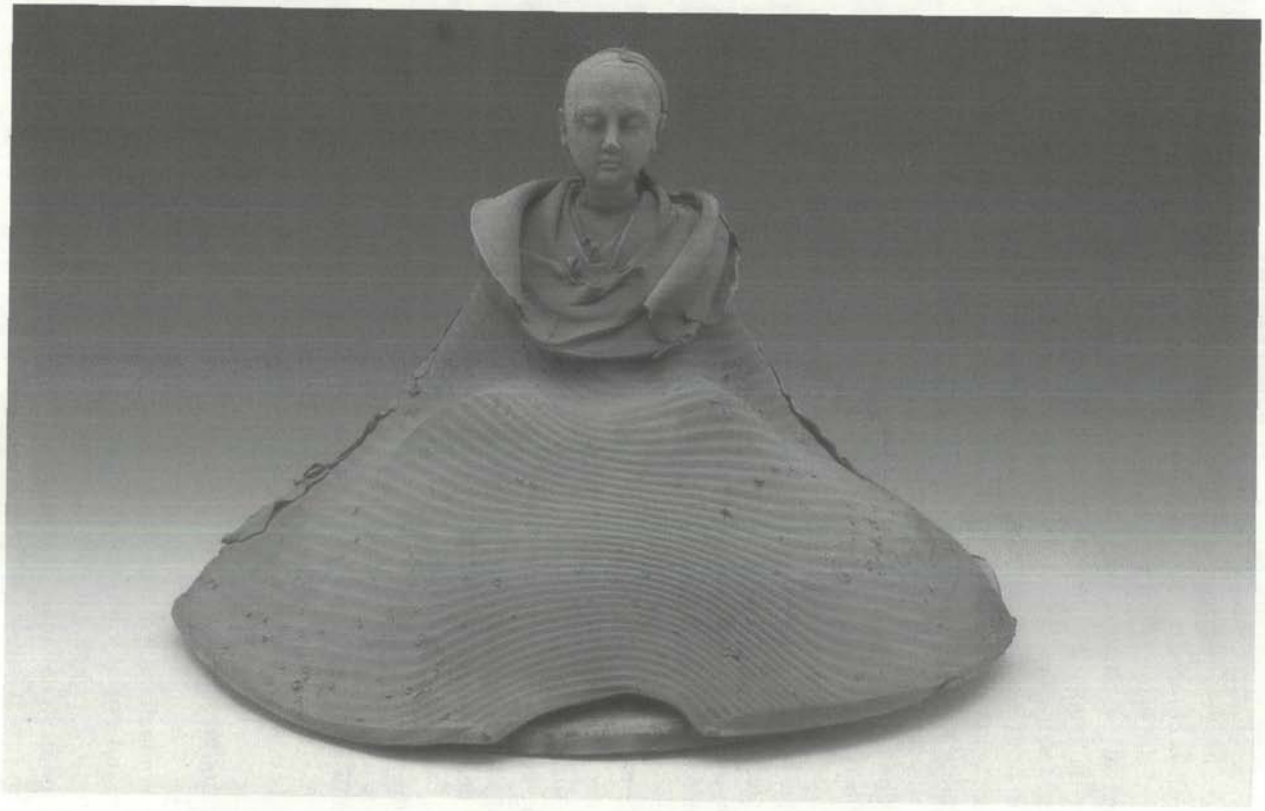
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hard by his extended encounters with Old Master painting (which took place in the last years of his life) and worked assiduously to come to terms with what he saw. When he died, Thompson was attempting to adapt the Old Master compositions he admired most to his personal narratives, trying to make the architecture of Poussin and Titian reverberate with the sound of superheated jazz riffs. It was hard to like many of the last pictures in the Rosenfeld show—some recalled nothing so much as late De Chirico. (I remember seeing more exciting work in Thompson's Rome studio, although how reliable my judgement was back then, when I was newly emerged from graduate school, is another matter). The sad part, of course, is that we'll never know where these pictures would have led.

Obviously, there was no shortage of painting shows worth seeing this fall, but sculpture exhibitions provided both the most dramatic and the most intimate works of the season: monumental architectural pieces by Anthony Caro and Richard Serra at Marlborough Chelsea and the Dia Foundation, respectively, and fragile clay figures by Georges Jeanclos at Garth Clark Gallery. Caro's tall wooden towers puzzled visitors who came to Marlborough's three-person show looking for welded steel; they knew that the rather inert stone eyeballs in the front of the gallery must be by Louise Bourgeois and the endless rows of overwrought bronze backs by Magdalena Abakanowicz, but where was the Caro? In fact, the tall, stacked structures were recent manifestations of something that has deeply engaged the British sculptor for more than a decade—the notion of a sculpture that must be entered to be fully understood. The austere, chimney-like towers slowly disclosed themselves as a pair of repeated, linked, but off-set units, pierced with narrow doorways. They were handsome enough from the outside, but the excitement came only when you entered, looked up into a dim, narrow, tapering space lit from above, and proceeded through a maze-like path that made you acutely aware of how and where you were moving: a gap, and then into the next tower, where you repeated the choreography of your trajectory to exit on the opposite side. The journey took you from darkened, silent space, sheltering but too small to be inhabited, briefly into light and a reminder of larger spaces, and then back into enclosed dimness. This mysterious passage distorted your sense of your own size by tapping into memories of childhood enclosure, "secret" places under tables, forbidden haunts. Presumably, more towers could be added—the structure implies an open-ended system of repetitions—which would heighten the experience, but it's effective as it is. From what I have seen, it's one of Caro's most potent "enterable" sculptures—a resonant, deliberately simplified structure that comes alive when you move through it.

The same description could be applied to Serra's much-publicized *Torqued Ellipses*, the trio of immense, warped oval steel enclosures jammed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Kamakura (1993) by Georges Jeanclos. Earthenware. 12 1/4 inches by 17 inches. Courtesy of Garth Clark Gallery.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

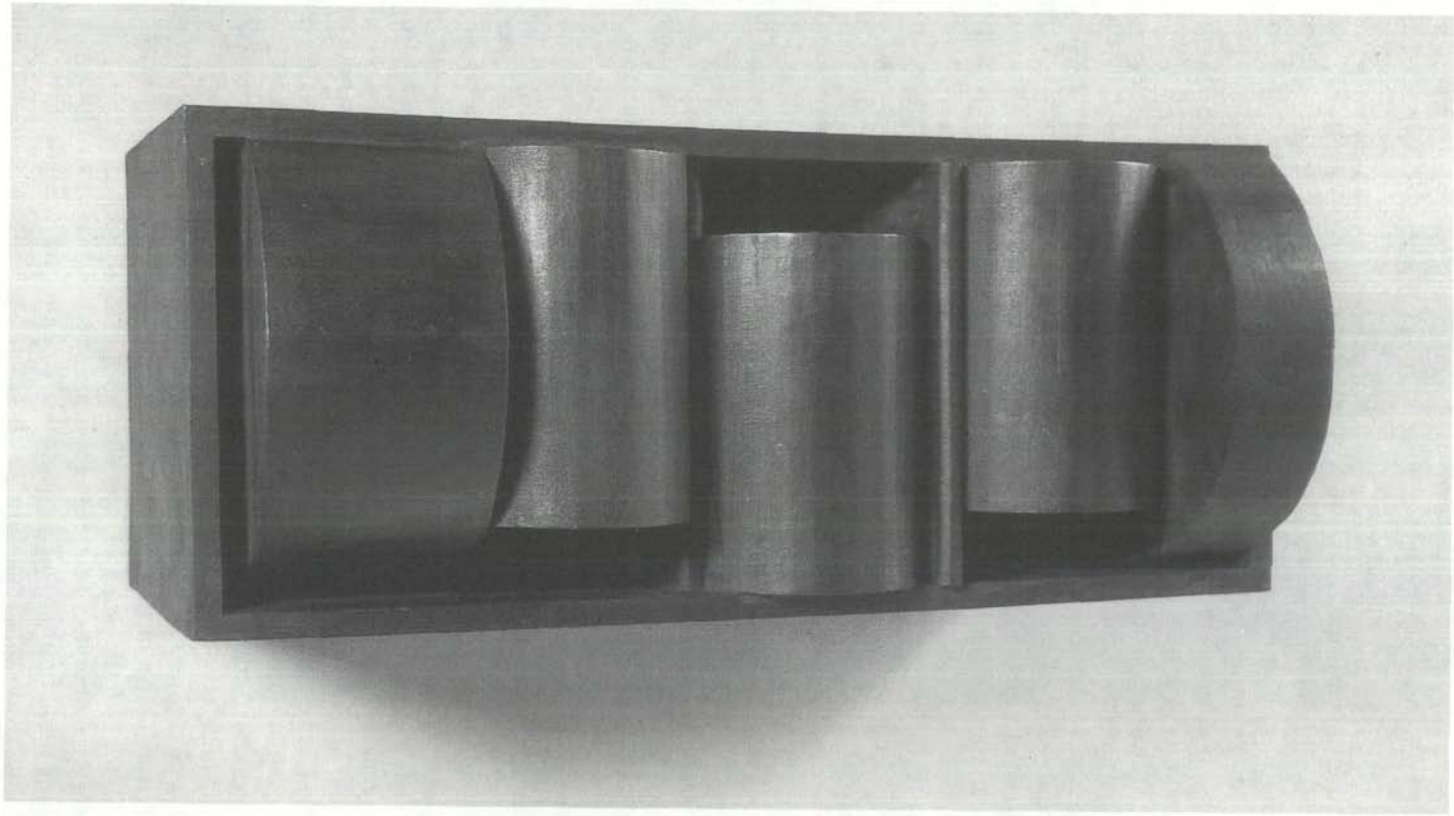
into a skylit industrial space across the street from the Dia Foundation's 22nd Street building, except that there is an element of threat implicit in Serra's pieces that is completely at odds with Caro's welcoming towers. It's partly because of the brute physicality of the steel, partly because of the disorienting effect of the vast enclosing walls themselves, which lean and bulge in defiance of gravity and logic. The sculpture consisting of two concentric rings that form a tall, tight, swooping corridor is particularly uncomfortable (no, I am not claustrophobic). Standing within the single arc pieces is something like being at an archeological site—inside a *tholos* tomb or surrounded by a cyclopean wall—but there is something prison-like about the space, as well. I suspect that the Serras would be even more potent installed out of doors. The contrast between the massive, twisting, confining walls and a circumscribed oval of sky above would add to their impact, making these huge enclosures seem more like places and less like oversized *things*. But the fundamental hostility of *Torqued Ellipses* would remain unchanged. Not only does their mass suggest danger, but everything about them seems calculated to make people feel diminished, insignificant. The Caro towers, on the other hand, enhance our experience of being inside our own bodies.

Georges Jeanclos's conception of sculpture is as far from Serra's as it is possible to get. The eloquent, androgynous clay figures of this acclaimed French artist, who remains too little-known in this country, are doll-sized, fragile; the matte, impossibly thin sheets of unglazed earthenware with which they are constructed seems about to shatter and crumble under the pressure of your gaze. The pyramidal *Kamakuras* (named for a famous Japanese shrine dedicated to unborn and stillborn children, populated with rows and rows of tiny figures) are like seated Buddhas, their delicate heads balanced above spreading cones of fragile clay, their gaze turned inward; the reclining *Couples* embrace under sheltering wrappings, sleep or watch the sleeper, as self-sufficient and withdrawn as the *Kamakuras*. Jeanclos's world is preternaturally silent and intensely focused, as though time were somehow magically stopped by his potent images. His figures draw you in, demanding and holding your attention, slowing everything down at the same time that they stir your emotions.

I don't know of any work quite like it and I haven't the faintest idea why it is so compelling. I've seen otherwise sensible, unsentimental people begin to weep in front of Jeanclos's sculpture. Anyone who was privileged to have met the artist himself, a deeply thoughtful, wry, extraordinarily well-read and cultivated man, had other reasons for being profoundly moved by his recent show, his first at Garth Clark Gallery; Jeanclos died earlier this year at sixty-four. He is greatly missed.

Michael Steiner's recent steel sculptures at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries and Willard Boepple's wood constructions at Tricia Collins Grand Salon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Early Shift (1996) by Willard Boepple. Pine, stain, wax and graphite. 9 inches by 18 1/4 inches by 12 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Tricia Collins Grand Salon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were closer in spirit to Caro's and Serra's aggressively physical works than Jeanclos's ethereal ones—which is not a value judgement. The large pieces in Steiner's exhibition interested me most because they were more playful and seemingly more spontaneous than has been typical of this meticulous artist in the past. In contrast to his usual serial method of exploring the permutations of a single structure, Steiner seemed to allow himself more liberty in his new work. One of the best was a schematic scaffolding balanced perilously on three legs, supporting a single outlined rectangle like a child's wobbly drawing of a window, each pane enclosing an asymmetrical, angular arched shape. One sculpture surrounded a tight central space with pierced walls, cage-like but at the same time suggesting a playhouse, while another, all wall, extended like an openwork barrier set on overscaled feet.

Since his debut in the 1960s as a precocious teenaged minimalist, Steiner's sculpture has been distinguished by its refinement and elegance. His newest work, with its crisp profiles, clean articulations, and immaculate junctures of part to part, is still elegant but more improvisatory and experimental than ever before. There are overtones of David Smith and of Caro, when he is at his most Smith-like, but the result is unquestionably some of Steiner's most spirited work to date.

"Spirited" is a word that also applies to Willard Boepple's recent wall-mounted sculptures, but so are "serene" and "solemn." At times all three adjectives apply to the same work, which seems even more improbable when you consider that the point of departure for these pieces is that most familiar of domestic phenomena, the shelf with things on it. Boepple's "shelves" can be stripped down, geometric units, neutral containers for harmoniously curved or austere flat elements, or they can be open boxes exploding with unlikely assortments of bulging, arcing turned pieces and chunks of lumber. At times, he seems to challenge Donald Judd, writing free-wheeling variations in both major and minor keys on Judd's bare-bones, repetitive themes. At other times, Boepple seems to be translating Baroque extravagance into a forthright modern language of woodworking. A recent series that incorporates piled up, wavy slabs of wood read as domesticated landscapes or seascapes, chunks of the outdoors neatly stowed on a shelf, an engaging idea, although I found myself more engaged by pieces whose economical forms referred only to themselves rather than evoking things at another scale; in these, nuances such as the difference between being permitted to see into a compartment and being excluded from it can become issues of overwhelming significance.

Boepple's sculptures embrace cool introspection and exuberant rejoicing, lean simplification and sensuous elaboration; they can be witty and profoundly serious. These shifts are heightened by their color: a volup-

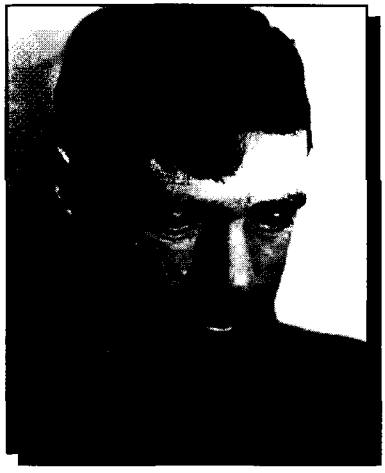
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tuously swelling sculpture stained a chalky red or a severely geometric one rubbed with silvery graphite. What unifies them is the memory of the hand. The sculptures remind us of what it feels like to pick up a hand-held object: projections suggest levers ready to be pushed. But while our tactile experience of the world informs these allusive pieces, they remain abstract, telling us about touch through the eye, so convincingly that the best of Boepple's resonant new sculptures can change the way we look at ordinary things around us.

Postscript: One of the most popular shows to open this fall was *Monet and the Mediterranean* at the Brooklyn Museum, the first serious study of the Impressionist master's response to three working trips to the South of France and Italy. It was also one of the most difficult exhibitions of the season, because it's hard to get past the appeal of the picturesque subject matter of the exhibited works and concentrate on them as *paintings*. (That Monet himself quickly began to seek more unexpected motifs in the South tells you that he had similar problems with the seductiveness of his setting.) The curators have helpfully grouped related pictures to emphasize Monet's process of fine-tuning images seized from the motif, transforming them in the studio into something other than responses to perceptions by setting up a dialogue among them. Not everything in the show is on the same level, but there are many first-rate paintings, mostly from Antibes and Venice. A couple of Venetian façade pictures, pulsing fields of purple and dull red, are as good as Monet gets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New from Cambridge



D. H. Lawrence

Volume 3: Dying Game 1922-1930

David Ellis

The final volume of the Cambridge biography of D. H. Lawrence chronicles his progress upon leaving Europe in 1922 to his death in Vence in 1930. Based on much new or unfamiliar material, it describes his travels in Ceylon, Australia, the United States, and Mexico in an increasingly desperate search for an ideal community. Upon his return to Europe in 1925, there is a detailed account of his rediscovery of painting, his battle against censorship, and the vitality with which he resisted the debilitating effects of tuberculosis. *Kangaroo, The Plumed Serpent,* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are usually seen as the literary landmarks of these years, but Lawrence also wrote remarkable novellas, essays, criticism, short stories and poems. Lawrence is revealed here not as the impotent and self-obsessed figure of popular legend, but as a man more complex, more humorous, and more exemplary in his resolute grappling with the central problems of life and death.

25421-3 Hardback $44.95

Available in bookstores or from

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

40 West 20th St., N.Y., NY 10011-4211
Call toll-free 800-872-7423.
MasterCard/VISA accepted.
Prices subject to change.
Web site: http://www.cup.org

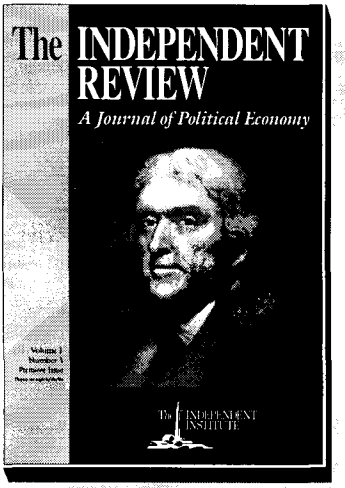
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Excellent, diverse and wide-ranging."

— IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ, Rutgers University

Transcending the all-too-common politicization and superficiality of public policy research and debate, ***The INDEPENDENT REVIEW*** is the interdisciplinary, quarterly journal devoted to political economy and the critical analysis of government policy. Edited by **Robert Higgs**, ***The INDEPENDENT REVIEW*** is superbly written, provocative, and based on solid scholarship.

Ranging across economics, political science, law, history, philosophy, sociology, and related fields, ***The INDEPENDENT REVIEW*** boldly challenges the politicization and bureaucratization of our world, featuring in-depth examinations of current policy questions by many of the world's outstanding scholars and policy experts. Undaunted and uncompromising, this is *the* journal that will pioneer future debate!



*"**The Independent Review** is of great interest."*
— C. VANN WOODWARD, Pulitzer Prize-Winner, Yale U.

*"**The Independent Review** is an exciting new journal."*
— JOHN DIGGINS, Prof. of History, City U. of New York

"... does not accept the pronouncements of government officials at face value, nor the conventional wisdom over serious public problems."
— JOHN MACARTHUR, Publisher, *Harper's Magazine*

*"**The Independent Review** avoids faddish pyrotechnics while seeking objectivity and high standards."*
— TIMUR KURAN, Prof. of Econ., U. of Southern California

"Excellent and profoundly important."
— TOM PETERS, Co-Author, *In Search of Excellence*

In Recent Issues:

The Ambitious, Accomodative Adam Smith
— SALIM RASHID

Preventing Banking Crises in the Future
— GEORGE G. KAUFMAN

What is Living and What is Dead in Classical Liberalism?
— CHARLES K. ROWLEY

The End of Welfare and the Contradiction of Compassion
— STEPHEN T. ZILIAK

The International Monetary System in Retrospect
— LELAND B. YEAGER

The Origins of the War on Drugs, 1984-1989
— BRUCE L. BENSON AND DAVID W. RASMUSSEN

Culture, Politics, and McCarthyism
— IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ

Market-Based Environmentalism and the Free Market
— ROY E. CORDATO AND PETER J. HILL

Why the Great Depression Lasted So Long and Why It Ended
— ROBERT HIGGS

The Case Against Psychiatric Coercion
— THOMAS S. SZASZ

- Feature Articles
- Book Reviews
- Special Features
- Figures and Tables
- 160 Pages per Issue
- March, June, Sept. & Dec.
- Annual Index
- Plus more . . .

Individual Subscriptions:
$27.95/1 year, $52.95/2 year
Institutional Subscriptions:
$49.95/1 year, $94.95/2 year
International orders:
Add $28/subscription shipping

Order Toll-Free (U.S.)

800-927-8733

Phone: **510-632-1366**
Fax: **510-568-6040**
review@independent.org
http://www.independent.org

The INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE

Dept. 5Q, 134 Ninety-Eighth Ave.
Oakland, CA 94603 U.S.A.

Look for *The INDEPENDENT REVIEW* on better newstands and in bookstores!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fifteen Years Ago Hilton Kramer Founded One of the Most Influential Periodicals in America*

Today, He's Offering You a Chance to Read It -- FREE!

Are you interested in a broad range of creative endeavor, from literature, painting, music, and architecture to theater, dance, and performance art?

Would you welcome spirited argument that engages cultural trendiness with uncompromising intellectual honesty and independence?

Will you accept a free copy of a journal that is literate, thought-provoking, and immensely fun to read?

If "YES" is your answer, we are pleased to introduce you to *The New Criterion*. For 15 years *The New Criterion*'s commitment to the highest critical standards has been an eloquent antidote to the political orthodoxy dominating our cultural life. Month after month, it serves up honest commentary and criticism on theater, the visual arts, literature, music, poetry, dance, and other points of cultural interest.

Bold, Articulate, Outspoken

It all began when Hilton Kramer dared to "disturb the universe" of contemporary arts and letters. After leaving his long-held position as *New York Times* chief art critic, Kramer started a literary-intellectual journal for the rest of us -- people who love literature and the arts but refuse to follow the lead of a single-minded critical "elite."

Today's *New Criterion* is no less committed to independence: in its critical judgments, in its expression of opinions and ideas, in its refusal to give ground to today's arbiters of artistic and literary tastes. Others have taken notice:

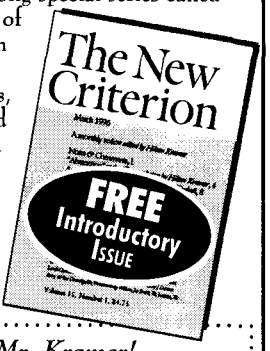
"Not since H.L. Mencken and *The American Mercury* has literary America seen so much fur fly," says *The Boston Review*

"...the best art magazine and a provocative force in other cultural areas," says *The Wall Street Journal*

"...stimulates, elucidates, and infuriates," says *The New Art Examiner*

Have a Look at Our Next Issue

Send for a free copy of our next issue. In it you'll find some of the world's most thoughtful writers reflecting on the state of the arts today as we start a year-long special series called "The Future of the European Past." Plus, great features, columns, and reviews. Mail the coupon below for a sample copy of *The New Criterion*. Do it today!



I Accept, Mr. Kramer!

Send me your next issue FREE. If I like it, I'll receive nine additional issues (a full year) for only $19.95 — a savings of over $27 off the single-copy price. Otherwise, I'll write "cancel" on your bill and owe nothing. Either way, the free issue is mine to keep. 6PR96

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834

*A survey of academics, writers, and editors published by Princeton University Press cited **The New Criterion** as one of the Top 10 most influential periodicals among American intellectuals.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Holocaust: Bird's Eye and Close-Up

NAZI GERMANY AND THE JEWS. VOLUME 1. THE YEARS OF PERSECUTION, 1933-1939. By Saul Friedlander. Harper/Collins. $30.00.
SHTETL. THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A SMALL TOWN AND THE WORLD OF POLISH JEWS. By Eva Hoffman. Houghton Mifflin. $25.00.

What else is there to know about the Holocaust, I asked myself as I picked up Friedlander's most recent book. What could he possibly add to our knowledge about the death camps, the motives of Hitler and his henchmen, the pervasive anti-Semitism and racial laws, the Nazi bureaucratic machinery and its internal rivalries, the relationships between victims and perpetrators, the involvement of officials and ordinary people, and the philosophical discussions on the ubiquity and banality of evil? Or to his own substantial *oeuvre* on the subject? Actually, Friedlander makes no startling discoveries. But he has written the most comprehensive and multi-faceted history of the Nazi era by taking account of, and synthesizing, what we know about German and other European nations' anti-Semitism and their behavior toward their Jews, by bringing into play concerns of internal strife and international politics—thereby tracing, step by step, Hitler's aims and options as these evolved over the days, the weeks, and the long run. In sum, he does not focus, for instance, on the importance of the Wannsee meeting, the number of ordinary Germans who perpetrated atrocities, and the other acrimonious polemics among historians. Instead, he accepts what he deems valid in each of their works and thus has produced the most clear-eyed answer to the unanswerable question: "How could the descendants of Goethe and Schiller have actively or passively allowed such heinous crimes to be carried out in their backyards?"

This volume begins with Hitler's accession to power on January 30, 1933, which immediately caused left-wing artists and intellectuals, such as Walter Benjamin, Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter, to flee, and ends with the preparations for "Operation White" and the signing of the German-Soviet Nonagression Pact of August 23, 1939, which cleared the last obstacle for the invasion of Poland and World War II.

The cancellation of Klemperer's and Walter's concerts, the public was told, had been necessary to protect these Jews from the "mood" of the Germans who had been provoked by "Jewish artistic bankrupters." By providing step-by-step accounts of individual responses by Jews and their German colleagues, in all their ambivalences and confusions, Friedlander—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

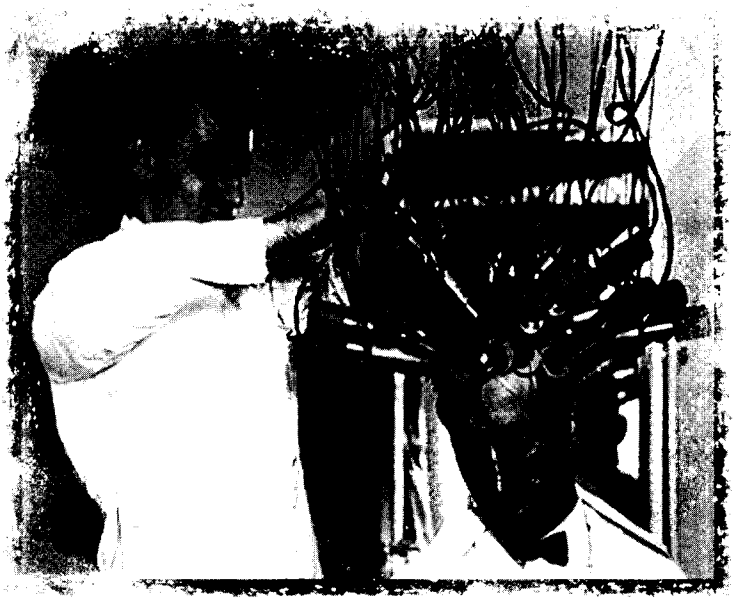
without ever saying so—lends credence to the historians who argue that there was method in the madness, as well as to those who maintain that one ordinance led to another and that what happened in Berlin was not necessarily true for Baden or Breslau. The "de-Jewification" of the arts proceeded apace, even though confusions arose when a performance was cancelled because a performer was thought to be Jewish and then went on when this was proven false. That a non-Jewish writer such as Thomas Mann, who then was outside the country, never returned (yet did not immediately make anti-Nazi statements) and that a Jewish writer such as Franz Werfel could protest to the authorities—as a Czechoslovak citizen, a resident of Vienna and a non-political individual—is logically explained. And so on.

Then, the leaders of most Jewish organizations, though cautious, did not panic and the Association of Jewish War Veterans hoped to be integrated into the new order. Moreover, German Jews were not certain that the Nazis would stay in power. During these first months, they were agitating primarily against the Communist threat—even though the *Reichstag* fire actually had laid it to rest. But anti-Jewish violence spread after the March elections. The story of vandalism and of the boycotts and harassment of Jewish businesses is in the details, that is, in the execution by local individuals and entities of directives from top-level Nazi organizations—which reached their climax in the pogrom of *Kristallnacht*.

Throughout, anti-Jewish legislation, based on definitions of who was a Jew or a *Mischling* of the first or second degree, was being "refined" and interpreted on a case by case basis. Abroad, Jewish leaders, mainly in the United States and Palestine, were unsure whether to organize protests. Either way, Goebbels' propaganda machinery triumphed—"proving" Jewish world domination or conspiracy or the disinterest (and thus agreement) of the rest of the world in the discrimination against the Jews. As their delegitimation proceeded, very few German Jews sensed the long-range implications of, for instance, the marginalization and then exclusion of Jewish lawyers, physicians and businesses. They, as well as foreign observers, tended to blame Hitler's fanaticism for the anti-Jewish policies which ultimately became "a political religion commanding the total commitment owed to a religious faith."

Friedlander carefully examines the ambivalent attitudes by the churches and their leaders. He meticulously integrates and differentiates the extent to which religious dogma and individual church fathers' humane values may or may not have dominated. He points out that Pope Pius XI, a staunch critic of the Nazi regime, had requested a draft of *Humani Generis Unitas* ("the unity of humankind"), in which racism was denounced and condemned. But his staff procrastinated and he died in the interim. "His successor, Pius XII, was probably informed of the project and probably took the decision to shelve Humani Generis Unitas."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Books: *the original virtual reality*

...Barnes & Noble at Boston University carries an extensive selection of them, from fiction to business and professional reference, with thousands of subjects in between. Our every day discounts, worldwide shipping, and special orders of any book in print at no additional cost make it easy to get what you need.

Barnes & Noble
AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Kenmore Square, Boston • MBTA Green Line • (617) 267-8484 • Web Site: www.bkstore.com/bu
Hours: Monday-Friday 9:30-9 (Street Level opens at 8am), Saturday 9:30-6, Sunday 12-6

10% Off	20% Off	30% Off
Every Hardcover Every Day*	Current *New York Times* Softcover Bestsellers	Current *New York Times* Hardcover Bestsellers

**Discount does not apply to coursebooks, reference or professional reference books, or bargain books. This discount may not be combined with other discounts. Certain exceptions apply.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Before and immediately after his rise to power, Hitler's denunciations of the Jews as masters of the world were directed against Jews identified with Bolshevism. His policies played to anti-Semitism in other countries—the Soviet Union, Poland, England, the United States and France—where unemployment was rampant and where Jewish immigrants (who were fleeing from Germany), if accepted, would be competing for jobs with the native populations. Since economic conditions in the 1930s already were making for volatile internal politics, anti-immigrant sentiment was high. Of course, "ordinary" anti-Semitism was rooted in different traditions—as Friedlander superbly demonstrates—but it could be exploited in order to keep out the Jews who had to leave Germany, Austria after the *Anschluss*, and soon the "Sudetenland" and then the rest of Czechoslovakia. That was why the conference at Evian, which was called to address the refugee question, began with fanfare but ended in fiasco and why the Swiss asked that a large "J" be stamped on Jews' passports. Since no country opened its frontiers, the Nazis now proclaimed that the problem was in no way only a German one, and the *Völkischer Beobachter* exulted that "Nobody wants them." Friedlander, however, doesn't stop at these obvious conclusions without also pointing to the "small islands of purely symbolic opposition within Germany," when, for instance, Toscanini refused to conduct the Salzburg festival. Yet he then demonstrates that exhibitions, such as "The Eternal Jew," that represented Jews in the most repulsive ways had the desired effect on visitors.

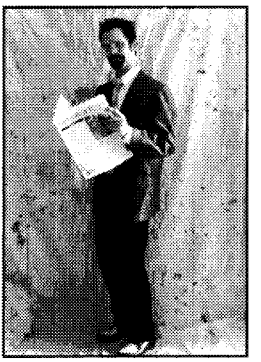
After the *Anschluss,* the anti-Jewish campaigns accelerated, with some Nazi honchos competing with each other for recognition. Laws and decrees followed one another, all intent on legally stripping Jews of every right and every bit of property while terrorizing them, rounding them up, and sending them to the concentration camps set up ever since 1933. Increasingly, Friedlander refers to the *Sonderrechte,* over two thousand laws that were enacted to dehumanize the Jews residing in German territories. He is precise in demonstrating how the pauperization of the Jewish population and growing obstacles to emigration created the need for public support, which was the last thing the Nazis were willing to offer. As Goebbels noted in his diary on June 10, 1938, "the Jews must get out of Berlin. The police will help." It did, as did all party organizations with the authorization of the *Gauleitung.* However, when the situation got out of hand it was stopped to avoid protests during an international crisis (the takeover of the Sudetenland), allegedly at the wishes of Hitler himself. But it was resumed when, after the seventeen-year-old Hershel Grynspan shot the German ambassador to Paris, Ernst vom Rath—which was used as the pretext to shooting, looting and setting fire to nearly every synagogue around the country. Goebbels commented on the ensuing *Kristallnacht* as "a good day's work." Here as elsewhere, Friedlander relies on diaries, testimonies of par-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE BOSTON BOOK REVIEW
http://www.BostonBookReview.com

The Best of Both Worlds

The Apollonian


The Bostonian

The Dionysian

The thinking person's literary arts magazine

- Fiction, poetry, interviews, essays and book reviews
- 10 issues presenting the highest achievements in contemporary writing for only $24
- Sold in over 1100 stores throughout the U.S. and Canada

Subscribe to our free bimonthly email newsletter. Send an email with **subscribe** in the subject line to:
Gazette@soapbox.BostonBookReview.com

Subscribe to the BBR. Discover the well-written.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: 1 yr. (10 issues) $24.00
Canada and International add $16.00
pr

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Credit Card Payments: No. _____
(or call 617 497-0344) Exp. date:___ Signature: _____

☐ AMEX ☐ VISA ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ DISCOVER

Or send check to:
THE BOSTON BOOK REVIEW, 30 Brattle Street, 4th floor, Cambridge, MA 02138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ticipants and official records and accounts. The lust for destruction was at its peak. The American consul in Leipzig reported, on November 13, that "the insatiably sadistic perpetrators threw many of the trembling inmates into a small stream that flows through the Zoological Park, commanding the horrified spectators to spit at them, defile them with mud and jeer at their plight . . . [And that] the crowd was powerless to do anything but turn horror-stricken eyes from the scene of abuse, or leave the vicinity." The day before, Göring had decreed that all of it had been the Jews' fault and that they would have to pay one billion reichsmarks to the Reich. And so on.

For some time, Hitler discussed sending Europe's Jews to an overseas colony, such as Madagascar. But in his Reichstag speech of January 30, 1939, he also appears to have used the Jews (they allegedly influenced the entire capitalist world) as pawns in his foreign policy, as a means of weakening opposition to his impending takeover of Czechoslovakia. Before long, they set up the *Reichsvereinigung* of all Jews, ostensibly to further their emigration, but actually to better control them and to separate them from the Aryan race. By the time Hitler celebrated his 50th birthday, on April 20, 1939, "many identified. . .with the *Volksgemeinschaft*. . .were beguiled by the esthetics of the Nuremberg rallies and enraptured by the victories of German athletes at the Berlin Olympics."

In a short review, it is impossible to do justice to this book. It is steeped in psychoanalytic insights without diagnosing or ascribing guilt and distinguishes anti-liberal and antimodernist racism from its racist type. While reading it, I looked at, among others, Wolfgang Sofsky's *The Order of Terror* and *The Concentration Camp*, which, despite painstaking descriptions, does not add anything new.

I read Jay Parini's *Benjamin's Crossing*, a beautiful novel about Walter Benjamin's days before committing suicide in Port Bou, the border between France and Spain. Since I had crossed that frontier just a few weeks before then and I still recall a much more primitive and ugly village than the one Parini invented, I was put off by the fictionalization. Such tales, I believe, ultimately will replace the horrible events: who doesn't prefer reading about a nostalgic death rather than a tortured one? This is the question Geoffrey Hartman addresses in his essay in this issue.

Eva Hoffman's *Shtetl* takes yet another approach. Noting that there were three million Jews in Poland in 1939 and between 240,000 and 300,000 at its end, that most of the Nazi concentration camps were in Poland, and that therefore it is assumed—erroneously—that every Pole was implicated in their extermination, she set out to discover what really happened, why recent history made for amnesia and increased polarization. With the assistance of a young Polish historian, she criss-crossed the country to find out about pre-Holocaust Jewish life—visiting sites of former *shtetls* that used to be scattered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"WORLD POLICY JOURNAL STANDS APART..."

"For freshness, originality, and provocative analysis, World Policy Journal stands apart."
Ronald Steel, author of *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*.

Return the coupon below to receive your first issue of World Policy Journal.
Then pay only $17.95 (over 40% off the newsstand price)
for four quarterly issues, or, write "cancel" on the invoice and owe nothing.
You may keep the issue for **FREE**, as our gift.

WORLD POLICY JOURNAL

An American Grand Strategy
The Quest for Order in a Disordered World
Walter Russell Mead

Global Culture and the American Cosmos
Orlando Patterson

The "Costs" of Human Ri
Is Liberal Internationalism

The Consequences of Sov
Indian Summer of Comm

The Coming Millennium
World Politics in the Twe
David Fromkin

Cold War, Chill Peace *Mic*
A Global Culture? *David*

Winner in the General Excellence category of the Utne Reader's 1995 Press Awards

YES, PLEASE START MY SUBSCRIPTION TO
WORLD POLICY JOURNAL
65 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003

Name

Address

City State Zip

OVERSEAS ORDERS: ADD $10 FOR SURFACE OR $20 FOR AIR MAIL DELIVERY

DESIGN BY DI VILLON STUDIO

The New School
WORLD POLICY INSTITUTE 65 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10003 212 229 5808

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around the countryside, interviewing friendly and hostile Poles and digging into archives. She then reconstructed the impact of alternating Nazi and Communist occupations during and after the war on the people of Bransk, a prototypical small town about 180 kilometers east of Warsaw, close to the border of what until recently was the Soviet Union and now is located in Belarus.

In 1939, over half of Bransk's population was Jewish—ranging from Hasidim to secularists, from merchants to poets, from traditionalists to Communists. Hoffman relates the variety of contacts among pre-Holocaust Polish and Jewish citizens by detailing some of their personal and business dealings and by recreating the array of their subsequent responses to the Nazi occupation, which often treated Poles as viciously as Jews. In other words, she tries to counter "the notion that ordinary Poles were naturally inclined . . .to participate in the genocide, and. . . [even now] must be viewed with extreme suspicion or condemned as guilty for the fate of the Jews in their country." She provides countless examples of peasants who gave away or even hunted out Jews to turn them over to the Nazis and of some others who supplied food and/or temporary shelter and thereby risked their own lives to save them. In sum, she tells the story of "coexistence as a long experiment in multiculturalism *avant la lettre*," where Jews "suffered their share of religious and folk prejudice. . . [yet] were to a large extent protected by laws and special privileges."

Hoffman's story emerges from the contradictory details and her scrupulous account of both good and evil incidents. She does her utmost to undercut biases on both sides. For instance, one Pole told her that after the war "a few of the [Jews] tried to come back, but one got killed and the rest got scared off," and another stated that they then "worried that without the Jews, nobody would know how to trade." The local gentry's practice of hiring Jews to manage their farms while keeping the farmers in a state of near serfdom and imposing exorbitant taxes on them all had made for earlier conflicts. And it had exacerbated age-old bigotry, reinforced the negative images of Jews that were rooted in folklore and, in turn, had contributed to the *shtetl*'s internal cohesion. Still, class distinctions existed on both sides: rich Jews gave their sons both Jewish and Polish tutors, read widely and in many languages, and some of them "were welcomed everywhere." Nevertheless, peasants held on to their superstitious beliefs about Jews, and Jews retained their skepticism about Poles.

Hoffman details the legacy of Polish history, such as attempts by Jews to evade Tsar Nicholas I's order to conscript Jewish boys, and the negative consequences this edict had on both Polish and Jewish internal and external bonds and on individuals' perceptions. She shows that when Poles gained a bit of power they made full rights for Jews conditional on partial assimila-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion and that some Jewish leaders then allied themselves with the Russian overseers who seemed to promise more. All in all, the Jewish inhabitants of Bransk were aware of larger politics and tried to position themselves as best they could. Most of them were extremely poor. Many emigrated by the end of the nineteenth century. Some joined the Jewish socialist party called *Bund* (founded in 1897), others joined the Polish Socialist Party (founded in 1892). Both groups were viewed with opprobrium by traditionalist Poles, as well as by Hasidim. Thus before World War I, the *shtetl* was divided between the old ways and the promise of the new. But when their Russian and German occupiers declared war on each other, the Poles tried to rid themselves of both—while tilting to the contending rightist nationalists or to the socialists. Bransk's Jewish population was divided into those who supported the Russians and those who cheered German victories. After the Germans and Austrians packed up on November 11, 1918, Pisudski declared Poland's independence. According to Hoffman's informer from Bransk, Irena Jablonowska, during the interwar years, "we [Poles and Jews] grew up together. I knew Yiddish." Polish and Jewish children met at school, although barriers continued to exist. Jews and Poles knew each other through proximity and familiarity but did not become intimate.

Relations among adults were more complicated. Beginning with their delegations to the Paris conference, Polish Jews were split primarily between the Zionists who wanted political and cultural autonomy and those who focused on civil rather than minority rights. Poles were divided between the socialist oriented, liberal nationalist faction and those who wanted guarantees of full rights, freedoms and cultural autonomy. Eventually all these demands were written into law, but the war against Russia in 1920—in which Bransk kept changing hands—introduced a further dilemma for the Jewish population: whether to side with the (Communist) Russians or the (Catholic) Poles, which entailed joining the Polish army.

Hoffman's summary of the affinities and differences among ethnic and religious interests and why these focused increasingly on the "Jewish question" alone makes this book worthwhile. She brilliantly describes how and why Polish Jews would recall the interwar years so divergently—due to the gap between Jews in *shtetls* and in large cities, to their personal experiences with Poles, and to their various political aspirations: "in Bransk alone, in the 1920s, there were no less than fifteen Jewish political groups"—where a father's four sons might belong to four different parties. Still, at the time, the radical wing of the national-radical Poles, the *Endeks,* were becoming more nationalistic and anti-Semitic, especially after Pisudski's death in 1935. Jews felt threatened by brutal tactics against them, which most Poles defended as "claiming their rightful share against a virtual monopoly on trade and commerce." Inevitably, tensions escalated, as did negative perceptions of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"other." Under the circumstances, Jews didn't want to join the army which, in turn, proved the Poles' stereotype of "the Jew."

After the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, some Jews fled to Russian territories. In Bransk, some Poles helped hide Jews; many others followed orders which included hauling the corpses of Jews the Germans had shot to a mass grave. Hoffman probes into the total lack of sentiment by the farmer who related this particular incident to her so many years later. She infers that it is impossible to tell to what extent his action was based on previous preconceptions and prejudices and to what extent he turned earlier resentments into the knowledge that anything at all was permitted when it came to Jews, including murder. Yet she immediately balances this tale by focusing on "a small island of opposition," on the pharmacist who made a hiding place behind piles of lumber for the Shapiro family and did not allow herself to know that she might be killed for this deed of mercy. When she was interrogated by the Gestapo in the presence of a doctor, a priest and a teacher, she denied her "complicity," and none of the others gave her away.

After the Germans in Bransk were again replaced by the Soviet army, old and divergent viewpoints re-emerged: the Russians were the Poles' traditional enemy, but for the Jews they were liberators. The communists and other leftists among them actively welcomed the Soviet occupation—although some soon would be upset by the "nationalization" of "bourgeois" property. But before long, placards of Hitler and Stalin embracing were posted everywhere, and a number of Jews—along with dissenting Poles—were deported to Siberia. Gradually, an uneasy calm settled over Bransk which, however, came to an abrupt end with Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and the Germans' takeover. The all-too familiar Nazi laws were enacted, and in the fall of 1941 the Jews of Bransk and surrounding villages were herded into an overcrowded ghetto. A year later, orders came to liquidate it. Then, some Polish policemen shot Jewish children; others delivered Jews to the Gestapo; yet others searched for Jews. A few Christians buried twenty-three Jews in the Jewish cemetery. In the end, only a few Bransk Jews survived; they had taken off to the woods, had joined small Jewish or Polish resistance groups or had been hidden by Poles. After the Soviet army left Bransk in January 1945, sixty-four Jewish survivors emerged from hiding. They were aware of the lawlessness and disarray and realized that farmers who had moved into their former homes were afraid they might reclaim them. After two Jewish women were killed, most of the survivors decided to move to Bialystok or to emigrate to the United States and Israel.

Trying to make sense of the wealth of information she has gathered, Hoffman focuses on the psychological effects of the war and of the Nazi occupation—when "ordinary decency and compassions were criminalized

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and rank brutality and sadism were normalized." Under these conditions, some "behaved swinishly" and even delighted in killing Jews, in delivering them to the Gestapo, while others observed common decency—which "required uncommon courage and selflessness." Hoffman does not preach forgiveness, but cautions that "in survivors' memories one can often discern, besides the fully justified hate, a kind of elision of hatred, a transference of it from the first-order cause of their suffering to the one nearer at hand." Indeed, the most persistent fact of the common history of the Poles and Jews of Bransk is the gap that still divides them.

Because the world of Polish Jews has disappeared, two sets of memories are left. Poles recall that they lost three million non-Jewish citizens during the war and put up more resistance to the Germans than any other occupied country. Jews recall that the other war, the Holocaust, was soon surrounded by secrecy and silence and that even afterwards, around 1946, there were some nasty outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence—which eventually induced the remaining Jews to emigrate. Later, Hoffman notes, anti-Jewish feelings arose from popular imaginings that Jews were dominating the Communist Party. In the end, despite some individuals' feelings to the contrary, nothing changed until 1989.

Now, a few Polish scholars are trying to dig into this past, which, as we know, is the only way to create a ground of commonality, to arrive at a degree of goodwill and even friendship. For Hoffman, who grew up in Poland, the research and writing of this book was healing, and the insights she gained have a similar effect on readers. If anything is to be learned from both Friedlander's and Hoffman's work, it is that distance rather than familiarity makes for contempt and worse and that proximity and interaction with the "other" are conducive to tolerance. And that emphasizing diversity may well induce racism rather than militate against it.

EDITH KURZWEIL

"Some of his best friends . . . ."

HITLER'S WIEN. By Brigitte Hamann. Piper Verlag. $49.95.

Jesse Helms might find this useful information: if Hitler, at 18, had not been so shy, he might have become a set designer—one more convincing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

argument against the theater as a haven for social undesirables. As it turned out, Hitler was a forerunner of Helms in his rampage against degenerate artists. Ironically enough, Vienna's pan-German revisionists of history anticipated some of the more extreme strategies in our contemporary culture wars.

In her highly informative (though not yet translated) book *Hitler's Wien,* German historian Brigitte Hamman tells of young Hitler's first visit to Vienna, in 1907, armed with an invitation to look up his idol, Alfred Roller, who was Mahler's and later Reinhardt's set designer. Roller would gladly discuss Hitler's professional training options with him. The connection was made through the Hitler family's landlady in Linz.

As an ardent Wagner fan and a regular at the court opera's standing room during Mahler's embattled final season, 1907-1908, Hitler greatly admired Roller's pioneering designs for the conductor's seminal Wagner productions. The young would-be artist set out three times to see the revered master. Terrified of rejection, he turned back every time and finally destroyed the letter.

There was little else the young man from the provinces had in common with his then forty-four year old role model, who was instrumental in the creation of the artistic landscape of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

Hitler's Vienna was not Wittgenstein's Vienna, although their paths crossed or almost did as pupils at the *Realschule* in Linz. For very different reasons, both were deeply affected by one of the most problematic cult figures in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Otto Weininger, whose dissertation *Sex and Character* continues to fascinate thinkers and writers for its tortured brilliance and because of his carefully staged suicide at the age of 23 in the house where Beethoven died. The fourteen-year-old Wittgenstein attended Weininger's funeral in Vienna in 1903. Some twenty years later Hitler appropriated Weininger's self-destructive anti-Semitism in his political propaganda.

One could even say that both Hitler and Wittgenstein were driven by what Ray Monk called *The Duty of Genius* in the title of his definitive biography of Wittgenstein. The obsessive aspiration to genius is a well-known hallmark of the *fin-de-siècle* mystique. Its legacy continues to torture Austria's aspiring artists and intellectuals.

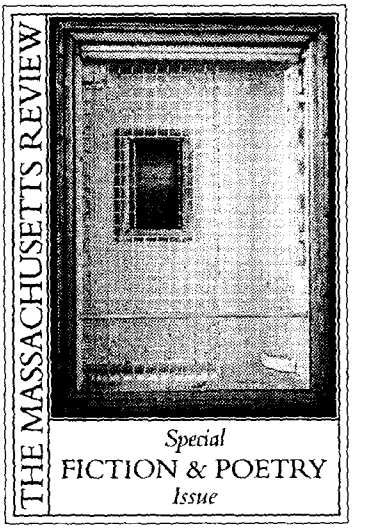
For the young Hitler, as for most would-be artists, it was a vague utopian notion, born of the romantic glorification of the inspired outsider which was particularly seductive to the ill-adjusted, the failures, the disenfranchised and the meek. As is well known, all evidence in the young Hitler's biography points to such a person.

Hamman's eminently readable, painstakingly researched book covers the period between 1907 and 1913, the years Hitler lived in Vienna. He spent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE MASSACHUSETTS REVIEW

Agha Shahid Ali
Julia Alvarez
Frank Casper
Stephen Dobyns
Martín Espada
Brigit Pegeen Kelly
Bill Knott
Maxine Kumin
Lê Thi Diem Thúy
Toni Morrison
Tim O'Brien
Marge Piercy
Adrienne Rich
Gary Soto
Piri Thomas
Jean Valentine



Special
FICTION & POETRY
Issue

essays - interviews - fiction
poetry

"Lively, vital...open and curious, willfully multicultural."
MARGE PIERCY

single: $6 year: $18 libraries $20

South College The University of Massachusetts
Amherst MA 01003

MR

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the first two years with a roommate in the working class district of Mariahilf, within walking distance of the Ringstrasse, with its imposing government buildings and his beloved Court Opera. Eventually, Hitler disappeared from the scene, presumably as a homeless drifter before he emerged briefly in a dismal home for the homeless. From 1910 to 1913 he finally settled in the Männerheim in Brigittenau, a well organized home for men, one of the most advanced of its kind, in one of Vienna's rapidly expanding outer districts, populated by workers, drifters, the poor and disenfranchised and the steadily swelling streams of recent immigrants from the crown lands. All of Hitler's neighborhoods were seedbeds for political agitation, most significantly from pan-German, anti-Semitic parties with charismatic leaders, most prominent among them Georg Ritter von Schönerer, his disciple Franz Stein and his unrelenting opponent Karl Hermann Wolf. Their extremist propaganda was disseminated and discussed in district newspapers, pamphlets and neighborhood education groups together with the latest myths of Germanic origin by self-proclaimed philosophers such as Guido von List or Lanz von Liebenfels. Their rabidly anti-Semitic rhetoric was largely ignored or laughed away as extremist hyperbole by the intellectual elite that has come to be mythologized as the whole of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. It is a landscape much closer to Gorki's *Lower Depths* than to Klimt's *Kiss.* These were the districts where impoverished apartment dwellers rented out their own beds during the day to *Bettgänger,* often entire homeless families, who would catch a few hours of sleep and then hope for a place on the crowded benches in the *Wärmestuben,* public "warming rooms." None of the apartments had heat. Those who could afford it kept warm in pubs and coffeehouses, which offered free newspapers and unlimited refills of the glass of water that accompanied one cup of coffee.

Hitler was an avid newspaper reader. Hamman meticulously combs through the publications of that time, tracing the pan-Germanic rhetoric as it would reappear in Hitler's reconstructed autobiography *Mein Kampf.* In her exhaustive research she closely examined local municipal archives, police records (every person arriving in Vienna had to check in and out with the police department), newspaper reports and official protocols of parliamentary sessions against Hitler's self-inventions, primarily in *Mein Kampf* and in the published accounts of some of his early friends and acquaintances. In addition, she tracked down the descendants of people who were in touch with him at that time. Drawing from overlooked sources and new information, she deflates some of the most persistent myths in Hitler's biography, including Joachim C. Fest's standard biography of 1973.

Hamman's strategy of referring to her subject throughout as "H." emphasizes the nondescript quality of this young man from the provinces without a clear goal, let alone vision, who could have been anybody.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Titles in the

The Moral Foundations of Civil Society

Wilhelm Roepke
With a new introduction by William F. Campbell

Wilhelm Roepke may have been the soundest economist of the twentieth century. Although he recognized the validity of the nation in the modern world, he was constantly trying to find the smaller agencies within society in which real allegiances and loyalties were to be developed. Half of this book is devoted to questions of economic and social life. The other half examines spiritual and national life.

ISBN: 1-56000-852-0 (paper) 250 pp. $21.95/£13.95

Library of Conservative Thought

A Better Guide than Reason

FEDERALISTS AND ANTI-FEDERALISTS

M. E. Bradford
With a new introduction by Russell Kirk

In this seminal volume, Bradford defines the Old Whig political tradition in American thought, showing that the inheritance of the prescriptive anti-federalists still lives. For him, important elements in our heritage from the American Revolution have been systematically hidden from our view by anachronistic and partisan scholarship; here is an attempt to return us to our heritage. Jeffrey Hart has called the book "a masterful phenomenology of the American and Western spirit."

ISBN: 1-56000-131-3 (cloth) 220 pp. $32.95/£20.95

Tensions of Order and Freedom

CATHOLIC POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1789-1848

Béla Menczer
With a new introduction by Russell Kirk

"The central thesis of this book, that a society rests on its religion, has great validity. Put another way, a society has nothing else to rest on, for religion is the set of beliefs which guides men. The problem is that nature of the religion which we believe. Alas, few there be who state this with clarity and force."

—Angus MacDonald, *The St. Croix Review*

ISBN: 1-56000-133-X (cloth) 205 pp. $32.95/£20.95

The Vision of Richard Weaver

Joseph Scotchie, editor

Richard M. Weaver was one of the founders of modern conservatism, an enduring intellectual figure of twentieth-century America. This is the first collection of essays about this seminal thinker.

ISBN: 1-56000-212-3 (cloth) 245 pp. $39.95/£25.95

Character and Culture

ESSAYS ON EAST AND WEST

Irving Babbitt
With a new introduction by Claes G. Ryn and an index to all of Babbitt's books

Irving Babbitt was the leader of the intellectual and cultural movement called American humanism or the New Humanism. These essays span his scholarly career and cover aesthetics, ethics, religion, politics, and literature—illuminated by the same unifying vision of human existence that informs and structures all of Babbitt's writing.

ISBN: 1-56000-806-7 (paper) 361 pp. $21.95/£13.95

Order from your bookseller or directly from

TRANSACTION

Department 95ALCT—Rutgers–The State University—New Brunswick, NJ 08903 USA
In the United Kingdom and Europe:
Transaction Publishers UK Ltd.—Book Representation and Distribution, Ltd.
244A London Road
Hadleigh, Essex SS7 2DE
—United Kingdom

transaction

Prices subject to change without notice. All major credit cards accepted.
Call 732/445-2280 or Fax 732/445-3138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Through the anonymity of an alert, autodidactic spectator the reader is drawn into the dark undercurrents of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna that erupted in the social arena and political theatre of a multi-ethnic empire in the final stages of collapse.

Young H., jobless, twice rejected by the Academy of Fine Arts, was an avid spectator at parliamentary sessions, which he attended almost daily. With 516 representatives, the parliament was the largest in Europe. In 1907, universal suffrage (that did not include women) went into effect for the first time and brought many more representatives from the non-German speaking districts. The embittered battles in the Imperial parliament for recognition of national difference in the Habsburg empire eerily foreshadow contemporary culture wars. The question of race was complicated by the issue of language. It was language that defined a people as a nation. The Jews complicated the problem. Spread out across the Empire, they spoke different languages and therefore could not be defined as a nation. For the first time, the German speaking group was in the minority. To confound the volatile racial issues, many assimilated Jews were ardently committed to German culture, among them Theodor Herzl and Victor Adler, the brilliant leader of the Socialist Worker's Party. Both of them started out in pan-Germanic organizations. They were eventually expelled by the newly introduced Aryan clause, which no longer differentiated between religious and assimilated Jews.

In legal terms Austria didn't even exist as a country, only as the hyphenated Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Strategies and rhetoric in the construction of national identity in competition with the narrative of the Aryan origin of Western culture by pan-German pseudo-philosophers along the precarious divide between relativized history and politicized mythology make the Imperial Endgame the uncanny cradle of postmodernity.

If all else failed, opposing politicians and parties could be ruined with smear campaigns aimed at their sex lives. Priests were favorite targets, if they were not ardent proselytizers of anti-Semitism and the superiority of the German race. The pan-Germans' unprintable anti-Semitic rhetoric was the order of the day. It was endorsed and further expanded by the Christian Socialists, which evolved from a group calling itself The Anti-Semites. This was the party of Vienna's beloved mayor Karl Lueger, Hitler's acknowledged role model, who is sentimentalized to this day as the *Herrgott von Wien*, the "lord god" of Vienna. It was Lueger who boasted "I decide who is a Jew." And so he did, publicly demonizing the Jews while appointing some as his closest advisors.

To make their point in parliament, representatives could talk for hours in their native languages, which were understood only by a few and not recorded in the official protocols, which were in German. Czechs became masters in holding the floor by reciting poetry or repeating nonsense sentences over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Recent articles:
PC Has a Price
William E. Simon

Racial and Sexual Politics in Testing
David W. Murray

Reassessing the Adversary Culture
Paul Hollander

Differing Views on *The End of Racism*
Dinesh D'Souza

Abuses of Scholarship in Constitutional Cases
John Finnis

Comments on the Culture Wars and Political Correctness
Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Sanford Pinsker
EDITOR
Franklin & Marshall College

The official journal of the National Association of Scholars

"Whoever wants to know what scholarship and teaching are suffering on the American Campus should read Academic Questions."
Jacques Barzun

"Because it promotes full academic freedom and the diversity of ideas in a time when these privileges cannot be taken for granted, Academic Questions *is a beacon to the academic world."*
Edward O. Wilson
Baird Professor of Science, Harvard University

Academic Questions

Published Quarterly

Subscription rates:
Individuals: $50/yr; $96/2yrs; $126/3yrs
Institutions: $116/yr; $204/2yrs; $264/3yrs
Foreign surface mail add $32/yr
Foreign airmail add $48/yr
(Rates subject to change annually)

transaction

TRANSACTION PUBLISHERS
DEPARTMENT 2097
RUTGERS–THE STATE UNIVERSITY
NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY 08903
WWW.TRANSACTIONPUB.COM

Call 908/445-2280 or Fax 908/445-3138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and over, reading the newspaper and eating sausage. The longest filibuster lasted thirteen hours. Fistfights accompanied by outrageous verbal insults would break out during sessions and in the hallways.

The old-style liberals, identified as Jewish, were attacked as internationalist, intellectual and out of touch "with the people." The new breed of politicians emphasized their humble origin, derided academics and attacked the modernists under the slogan "Art isn't international, but *völkisch*," which is to say, nativist, ethnocentric and populist, as opposed to modernist, meaning Jewish.

Young H. obviously learned his lessons, among others the proposal by one representative to brand gypsies with numbers so they could be tracked in organized camps.

As theatrical spectacles the parliamentary excesses complimented young H.'s Wagnerian epiphanies at the opera. The Imperial *mise-en-scène* of the Kaiser's sixty-year reign further contributed to the young man's understanding of political *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The obligatory grand parade was to be a spectacular showing of all the Empire's nations. The Hungarians were the first to withdraw. For them, it wasn't 1848 that marked the beginning of Emperor Franz Joseph's reign, but rather 1867, the year the Hungarian constitution was officially acknowledged and the Kaiser crowned king of Hungary. The Czechs followed suit when they found themselves represented in the parade as a defeated nation. The Italians backed out because of the procession's grand finale which would feature the military band playing the Radetzky March in celebration of the beloved war hero's defeat of the Italians in 1848. The Croats were offended by a program note pointing to their "special talent. . .for the appropriation of foreign property." Unlike the Hungarians, Czechs and Italians, the Croats could be appeased with a public apology by the parade committee.

The parade went on in undiminished, self-congratulatory glory, celebrating the Habsburgs' military victories throughout the centuries with twelve thousand participants, among them four thousand in ancient historic regalia and eight thousand in national costumes, offering their homage to the Kaiser in their national languages, on horses and floats, accompanied by canons and cattle.

But what came as the biggest shock for the Viennese were the masses of people from the poorest areas of the monarchy who came to participate in the parade. Never had they confronted so many of their compatriots, impoverished "foreigners," most notably from Galicia and Bucovina. Karl Kraus attacked their "ugliness" while star architect Adolf Loos publicly complained about the embarrassing backwardness of some of the participating nations.

Anti-Semitism was often indistinguishable from the condescension toward and hatred of any non-German "foreigner" from the Eastern

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

regions. In Hitler's childhood, it was the neighboring Czechs who were perceived as the biggest threat to the pan-German aspirations of his native area. His early biography doesn't indicate any anti-Semitism. In fact, "Some of his best friends . . ." emerges as a sort of *leitmotif* in Hamman's book, ranging from the Hitlers' Jewish family doctor Eduard Bloch to some of his closer associates at the Männerheim and the picture frame dealer Jakob Altenberg who sold Hitler's paintings primarily to Jewish customers. Young H. remained a supporter of Mahler and defended the integrity of Wagner's scores against the cuts enforced by anti-Semitic groups.

So when and how did Hitler become the demonic anti-Semite? Were there stages in between, when he "simply" exploited anti-Semitism as an effective political strategy, emulating the striking success of Vienna's mayor Lueger? There is no need for Hamman to become fixated on these questions, as if a psychological insight might somehow make an ethical difference in the end result. A prominent member of Vienna's Jewish community told Lueger, "I don't hold it against you that you are an anti-Semite, but rather that you are not." As Hamman's book chillingly illustrates, the shrill histrionics of Vienna's populist theatre of demonized politics provided a fertile training ground for the anti-Semitic platform Hitler developed later. Whether it "came from the heart" or was cold-bloodedly, if "brilliantly" constructed, as it were, is certainly a distinction eclipsed by Hitler's "final solution."

GITTA HONEGGER

Friend or Foe?

GERMANY UNIFIED AND EUROPE TRANSFORMED. BY Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice. Harvard University Press. $35.00.

In *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice present a sympathetic view of American and Western diplomacy in the last days of the Cold War. The authors do not write in a triumphalist or Whiggish spirit, but they are attuned to the contingency and openness of events; they were part of the Bush administration's foreign policy team. They helped make policy aimed at bringing about a unified Germany integrated into the NATO alliance as well as a peaceful dissolution of Soviet power in Central and Eastern Europe. Perhaps the most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remarkable aspect of their story—told at times with a level of detail far beyond what is necessary for their purposes—is that these outcomes came about with the agreement of Mikhail Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. This book examines how President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker, along with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and their respective aides, sought to attain their maximum goals while reassuring Soviet as well as other European leaders, that what was best for the United States and Germany was also best for the Soviet Union, and the European powers.

As part of the White House foreign policy team, the authors were able to gain "unlimited access to all relevant documents." Customarily, classified government documents remain inaccessible to scholars for thirty years. The authors admit that other scholars "must, for a time, take on faith that we have used our evidence properly." Even though historians must object that they will not be able to check many of the references for some time to come, the publication of this work as an insider's report is nevertheless welcome for it enhances our understanding of very significant events.

One of the main threads of the authors' account concerns the commonality of view between American and West German leaders about German unification. Repeatedly, Bush and Baker sought to assuage not only Soviet concerns but the muted worries of François Mitterand and the sharp reservations of Margaret Thatcher. In view of the centrality of American support for German unification, the authors might have examined in more depth why the Americans were so much more supportive of unification and Germany's European neighbors. The absence of a direct German attack on the United States in World War II, geographical distance from a unified Germany, or more likely, the trust developed between the American foreign policy establishment and the West Germans during forty years of Cold War are left unexplored.

The authors' central argument is not widely enough understood outside of foreign policy circles. That the Bush administration pursued a policy aimed at winning the Cold War and attaining the maximum goals of the Western alliance without humiliating the leadership of the Soviet Union or bringing about a Stalinist backlash was a major accomplishment. When West German politicians, led by Kohl but also by Willy Brandt, rejoiced in the opening of the Wall, George Bush expressed his pleasure in a muted and understated manner. His reticence, which left the American public without a clear, dramatic presidential statement, had a purpose. Zelikow and Rice stress that Bush was concerned that American gloating or triumphalism would undermine Soviet, and, early on, East German support for reform. How to win the Cold War without humiliating Gorbachev was a major preoccupation for Bush and Baker.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Second, American support for German unification combined with an American commitment to remain a military power in Europe and to locate a unified Germany within NATO was necessary in order to convince the European countries adjacent to the Soviet Union and Germany to accept this outcome. Zelikow and Rice recount how, in the midst of the summer crisis of 1989 caused by the stream of East German refugees departing for Austria and West Germany via Hungary. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl found strong support from President Bush for the view that a unified Germany would not be a threat to Europe. Despite reservations, Bush "settled the issue once and for all" within the American government and supported Kohl's gestures pointing to unification as a desired outcome—at a time when the British and French were far less enthusiastic.

The degree of opposition to German unification from Margaret Thatcher that emerges in these pages is striking. She was so worried that border changes would undermine Gorbachev and the entire reform process in the Soviet Union that in the Fall of 1989 she repeatedly supported the continued existence of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In this same period, Bush made clear his support for German "self-determination" and for democracy in the still existing German Democratic Republic. Thatcher told Bush that German reunification would mean that Gorbachev would be replaced by hard-liners in Moscow who would blame him for losing Eastern Europe and East Germany and permitting the emergence of the nightmare of a unified Germany. François Mitterand's views were less firm but he too sought to balance Franco-German cooperation with French fears.

Third, Zelikow and Rice explain how Europe's, including Moscow's, fears of German unification were overcome. In 1989-1990 political leaders were following popular sentiment: the peoples of East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were outpacing them. In November 1989, Kohl's ten-point program, calling for fundamental political and economic change in East Germany, free elections and possible German unity, was the most successful effort to harness popular energies for long-held political goals. Kohl's plan caused understandable unhappiness in East Berlin and on the West German left as well as in London, Paris and Moscow. Yet he repeatedly received strong support from Bush. Both agreed that so long as German unification went hand in hand with continued German integration into the Western Alliance it would contribute to peace and stability in Europe. Such quick changes accompanied by so much popular emotion were unsettling to many European leaders.

In my view, the book supports the thesis that a fundamental change, indeed a foreign policy revolution, in Moscow's thinking about the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American position was the key precondition that made possible the peaceful unification of Germany. Throughout the Cold War in Europe, most recently in the disputes over the euromissiles of the 1980s, Moscow sought to reduce or eliminate American power in Europe. During the postwar era Soviet leaders viewed the American presence in Europe as a serious military and political threat. Some of the most remarkable passages in the authors' account recall the change in this basic view and the ability of Bush, Baker and their aides to quickly and intelligently grasp the significance of the change. If German unification was going to take place—and it seems that it could only be stopped by a use of force which Gorbachev rejected—then from Gorbachev's perspective a unified Germany within NATO was less of a nightmare than a unified Germany outside NATO. Both Bush and Baker in meetings with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze argued that a unified Germany within NATO was preferable to a unified Germany tempted to develop its own nuclear weapons. Instead of being a source of alarm and mistrust for the Soviets, Kohl's Atlanticism and Europeanism, his insistence that a unified Germany be a member of NATO, served to reassure them that if they could not prevent German unification, then a unified Germany within NATO was in the national interest of the Soviet Union.

In one of his meetings with Shevardnadze, Baker acknowledged that the idea that a unified Germany was preferable to a neutral Germany, which the Soviets were initially advocating, "might be hard for you to believe. In effect it suggests that the risk comes not from the United States, which for a long time you've seen as your enemy, but instead it suggests that greater risk could come from a neutral Germany that becomes militaristic." In February 1990, when Baker made this same argument in the Kremlin Gorbachev said "basically, I share the course of your thinking. . . there is nothing terrifying in the prospect of a unified Germany. The best way to constrain that process is to ensure that Germany is contained within European structures." Gorbachev assumed that there would be no eastward extension of NATO and now regarded the presence of the United States in Europe as a stabilizing rather than threatening fact.

After reassurances from the American administration Gorbachev, in his meeting with Kohl in February 1990, told the West German chancellor that he was willing to accept German unification and that it was up to the Germans to decide if and when they wanted to unify. With a Soviet government committed to domestic reform and the peaceful devolution of its empire in Eastern Europe, officials in the United States and in the Federal Republic "were exceedingly careful to conduct the unification process in a way that would not make the Soviet Union look like the great loser" and give support to the coalition of unreformed Communists and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

embittered nationalists furious over the loss of the Soviet position in Europe. Zelikow and Rice stress that American officials were aware that they were winning a complete political victory. Yet they "wanted the Soviets to accept the result and believe that they retained an appropriate, albeit diminished, role in European affairs. They did not want Moscow to nurture a lasting bitterness that would lead them someday to try to overthrow the European settlement."

The authors take us through the details of the "two plus four talks," further meetings in Moscow, Bonn and Washington. For Zelikow and Rice, the devil was in the details, in the timely responses to fast moving events, the ability to see the main chance and above all in the capacity in Washington and Bonn to understand the depth of changes in foreign policy thinking that had taken place in Moscow. For years, Western observers had repeated that the path to German unification passed through Moscow. This account offers us a chronicle of how Washington's statesmen and diplomats and Bonn's political leader nudged the last leaders of the Soviet Union to the conclusion that they and Europe could peacefully digest a unified Germany if, and only if, the United States remained a European power to help insure that this new Berlin republic would remain a source of peace and stability in Europe.

The authors are right that this outcome was anything but inevitable. Given the level of anger and disgust with the German Democratic Republic, it is difficult to imagine an outcome with two German states, though had the United States, the Soviet Union, or a left-leaning West German government taken different positions in 1989 this outcome is hardly inconceivable. Had a Social Democratic government been in office in Bonn, a unified but neutral Germany would have been a greater possibility though, ironically, Gorbachev might have found that prospect more alarming than the one offered by his right-of-center counterparts, Bush and Kohl. The authors compellingly demonstrate how and why political leaders in Moscow, Bonn and Washington arrived at the above conclusions. In the midst of the tense battles of the Cold War, who would have imagined that it would end with Soviet leaders agreeing to a democratic and unified Germany while welcoming the Americans—again—to help insure that nightmares of the German past did not return to Europe's future?

JEFFREY HERF

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spy Game

WHITTAKER CHAMBERS. By Sam Tanenhaus. Random House. $35.00.

Sam Tanenhaus has written what is likely to be the definitive biography of Whittaker Chambers. Here are the facts, all the facts and nothing but the facts. It is a solid achievement. Yet in spite of the knowledge now available about him, or maybe on account of it, Chambers remains elusive. He was a most peculiar character, somehow detached from other people and his surroundings, a fugitive from some doubtful country, anti-Ruritania, without passports or a flag. Everything was against him and yet his tragedy was also of his own devising. Perhaps only Shakespeare could have risen to the complexity of it.

"I am an outcast," Chambers was to write in *Witness*, his own sad but powerful memoir. "My family is outcast. We have no friends, no social ties, no church, no organisation that we claim and that claims us, no community." It was true. In his own family he experienced madness and poverty, the uncertain sexuality of his father and the wilting artistic pretensions of his mother. His parents' house was literally falling to bits in a perfect symbol for middle-class people sliding off the social scale. Seemingly a man born without hope, his brother committed suicide at the age of twenty-two. Chambers put the whole blame on American society, summarily declaring that he was at war with it.

Tanenhaus sees Chambers as the author and sole actor of an endless series of plays, each one a staging of himself for purposes of escape and recovery. He ran away from home and took a laboring job, went to Columbia University only to drop out, launched into prose and verse, stole library books, was a Republican supporting Calvin Coolidge, and, like his own father, had lovers of both sexes. The process of cause and effect brought him slap up against his own limitations, whereupon he recast himself with great invention into another play, another false start, romantic and inconsequent. Contemporaries of the caliber of Lionel Trilling, Meyer Schapiro, Herbert Solow and Mark Van Doren nonetheless had no doubt that he was building on real gifts rather than scattering himself to the wind.

Chambers joined the Communist Party in 1925, scripting a part for himself with a timetable, a community and committment. As a system of values and as a pattern of behavior, Communism had little point of entry into American society; it was an alien transplant at best. Party foot soldiers were usually either immigrants from Russia, Poland, and Hungary, or unassimilated, first-generation Americans. With rare exceptions, they were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unable to transcend circumstances almost certain to lead to failure as Communists and as human beings.

Within every Communist Party, including the CPUSA, the divide between ordinary people and intellectuals was far more absolute than in the rest of society at large. Class war and revolution might look like straightforward notions, but language skills and high academic input were required to master the dialectics in which they were wrapped and so open up career prospects in the Party. Like other intellectuals, Chambers had a tangle of motivations to become a Communist—the will to power, adventurism, dandyism, and in the lower depths of the psyche, hatred of what one's own country was imagined to be. Like others too, Chambers sought to resolve painful internal conflicts. In particular he admired the order that Communism ostensibly brought to chaos. At the *Daily Worker* and then at *The New Masses*, he turned out agitprop, earning a reputation as "the hottest literary Bolshevik" in New York.

There was nothing secret here. Chambers was only one among tens of thousands of opinion-makers and publicists in every sphere who were widening and spreading the delusion throughout America and Europe that the Soviet Union was morally and even materially superior to all the world's democracies. Taking at face value whatever the Soviet Union said about itself, they suspended the usual scientific principles of verification, otherwise established and observed in an age of technological advance. Credulity, hysteria and willing martyrdom of the kind had only been seen before in the early Christians singing hymns as they offered themselves to Roman persecution. Much of this century's totalitarian crime was the result of a willing suspension of rationality that will certainly bemuse future historians.

During the years of Chambers' Party involvement, Stalin was hardening his grip on absolute power, tuning the machinery of mass terror and then operating it at full capacity. Grotesquely, in the face of all evidence about Soviet reality, the number and influence of Communists and fellow-travellers grew. Caught in the wake of the Stalin-Trotsky struggle and the purging even of American Trotskyites in repercussion, Chambers must have known how Communism actually functioned. Yet it was from 1932 to 1938, at the peak of Stalin's inhumanity, that he cast himself into the part of Soviet agent and spy. There are no signs of moral or emotional struggle about it. Tanenhaus flatly says that Chambers was "inclined to accept" the order from Moscow that was to determine his fate.

Invisible in the shadows of official Communist parties, the several agencies of Soviet intelligence and subversion were building their network all over the world in search of power and empire. Unparalleled anywhere for its scope and persistence, this effort could never have succeeded with-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out the fellow-travelling climate of approval of everything Soviet. A careless ignorance about Communist ambitions and practices pertained at all levels of American society, into the highest reaches of the administration. As Tanenhaus drily puts it, there was "no surveillance" by the FBI or anyone else.

The one possible risk of exposure of Soviet methods lay in the defection of an agent who had understood, and regretted, the consequences of his actions. To this day there are several unexplained murders suggesting that the Soviet Union had detected potential or actual backsliders in their American networks. To Moscow, Chambers must have seemed born to be an ideologue, whose grievances against the world guaranteed loyalty, in the mold of Kim Philby or Richard Sorge. Recruits of that kind were so unexpected that they could hope to pass unsuspected for a lifetime.

Alexander Ulanovsky and Boris Bykov were the successive controllers in America of Chambers in his years as a Soviet agent. Under them was the sinister J. (for Josef or more properly Joszef) Peters, who until his own downfall was in charge of the Party's underground apparatus in America. Documents subsequently discovered in the Soviet archives and published confirm Chambers' account of these men. Under the circumstances, results simply fell into their laps. None of them was particularly capable. Much was at stake, but the way these Soviet big-shots ran between safe houses and clandestine rendezvous, with one eye on the shops and the other on the lookout for the non-existent American secret services, has elements of farce, in retrospect at least.

As a spy, active in Washington, Chambers had the task of collecting, copying, and handing on to Moscow official documents obtained from Communists employed in government. Members of a secret cell recruited by Hal Ware, a rather flamboyant specialist in agriculture with first-hand knowledge of Soviet Russia, they were what can only be called the better class of Communists, quite another cut from the shabby Party colleagues Chambers had known hitherto. Enjoying the very privileges they were undermining, they were on a two-way bet, expecting to come out on top whatever happened.

Chambers looked up to these new friends and collaborators in espionage, Alger Hiss and his brother Donald and Julian Wadleigh of the State Department, Harry Dexter White of the Treasury, Nathan Witt, the Reno brothers, and the rest of this really rather impressive and well-placed, not to say snobbish, cell. Tactfully, Hiss and his wife Priscilla instructed the insecure Chambers in the social graces. Fatally for him, as it proved, Hiss made available with lordly elegance his house and his car. It must have seemed inconceivable that admission to such an enthusiasm as birdwatching could ever be used against him or that every aspect of his Woodstock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

typewriter would be minutely analyzed. Years later, in court and again in his autobiography, Chambers made a point of stressing that he saw Hiss as a friend and a good man, as much a victim as he was himself of the forces of history.

Two developments might have warned Moscow that their man was not all he seemed: he married and he bought a farm. Giving up male lovers, according to his own testimony, and acquiring a regular means of support, he was free to construct a down-to-earth American way of life. Even the indefatigable Tanenhaus cannot provide information for much of a portrait of Esther Shemitz, the shy and almost invisible wife who sacrificed so much for this husband of hers. At one point in the trials, she exclaimed that he was a "great man," and that was enough for her. Still, during the clandestine years, she and the two children had to succumb to an extensive and bewildering series of false names and identities. It cannot have been easy to recall who exactly they were supposed to be.

"How do you break from Communism?" Chambers asked, to give the answer, "Slowly, reluctantly, with agony." In some process of mental evolution, he seems to have exhausted himself. His contemporary reaction to the unfolding Stalinist show trials and terror of the Thirties is not known very exactly. Perhaps he was plain scared. Fleeing into hiding, he made sure to have a gun. One of the most important Soviet defectors was Walter Krivitsky, with whom Chambers had lengthy heart-searching conversations. Krivitsky was to be murdered in a Washington hotel early in the war. (Ulanovsky's widow has recorded how one day in 1939 her husband happened to run into Bykov in a Moscow street and asked with surprise, "Are you still alive too?")

From the break onwards, of course, everything Chambers did has been put through the forensic mill from every possible angle. It remains an astonishing story, told here very readably, with extensive extracts from the various hearings and trials. On the one hand, Chambers took the sensible precaution of safely hiding evidence against Hiss, thus ensuring his own ultimate victory. On the other hand, fearing punishment for what he had done, he did not make a full confession to the authorities, thus ensuring that it would be dragged out of him piecemeal in what often threatened to be defeat.

As a writer and editor with *Time* from 1939 to 1948, he acquired a reputation as an anti-Communist, the mirror image of the red-hot literary Bolshevik he had once been, deliberately going against the grain in order to be unpopular. Henry Luce and his chief editor T.S. Matthews were almost alone in championing someone so widely seen as perverse. The huge majority of staff members, including some with national reputations like John Hersey and Theodore H.White, uncritically defended the poli-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cies of the Soviet Union and China, midway between fellow travellers and dupes. No wonder Chambers flinched from going public.

Elizabeth Bentley had taken the place of Chambers in the underground, and her defection in turn forced him into the open to submit to the inevitable procedures of the New York grand jury, the hearings before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and finally the two perjury trials. Defection of agents did indeed do as much as anything else to educate the West about Soviet ambitions.

The Cold War would have been waged in any event. The ruin of Germany and the expansion of the Soviet Union into Central Europe had shifted the balance of power dangerously to Moscow's advantage. Soviet aggression and bad faith called democracy into question. To have been able to rise above the context with its high political implications would have required ruthless self-confidence on the part of any individual. Chambers was fragile; he went out of his way to avoid being an informer; pitifully, he swallowed poison in an attempt to commit suicide.

There he stood for the best part of three years in the public glare, an admitted Communist spy, therefore a traitor by definition, a pathological liar as well, to be ridiculed for his appearance, for his bad teeth and his waistline, without charm, dressed apparently for a funeral, yet with a whiff of the farmyard about him, staring up at the ceiling as if afraid of eye contact. "Poor Chambers," Richard Nixon exploded at a moment when the case had looked like going wrong, "nobody ever believes him at first." And was he not really an instrument of HUAC, Nixon's stool pigeon, someone who had sold his soul in order to discredit the New Deal and left-wing values in general? And wasn't he as well a homosexual, a blasphemer, a "psychopathic personality" in the words of one egregious expert witness who was no expert at all, a sponger, thief, and forger? "Moral lynching" was the phrase of John Dos Passos for what occurred.

Although they appeared contradictory, Chambers and Hiss were two of a kind, each the other's foil, each the other's nemesis. But Hiss looked a gentleman through and through, youthful and clean-cut in a smart linen suit, smiling to the grandees who testified to his splendid career and achievements, wafting on the glories of the Ivy League and the State Department. He and Priscilla smoked their cigarettes out in the corridors, politely answered the admiring pressmen, linked arms to go home. Chambers was correct when he wrote about Hiss that "His roots could not be disturbed without disturbing all the roots on all sides of him."

Angrily or fastidiously, the best people, Judge Felix Frankfurter, Dean Acheson and Mrs. Roosevelt, all the liberal East Coast opinion-makers and editorialists, turned their backs on Chambers. President Truman dismissed the charges against Hiss as a red herring. The worst people were as usual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

full of passionate intensity. So Chambers found himself at the center of the immense human drama of standing for the truth in the face of general distrust and contempt.

Something of a precedent existed in the scandal that has gone down in history as the Dreyfus Affair. Unlike Chambers, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was never a spy, and American justice furthermore delivered the right verdict with the minimum of prevarication, whereas the authorities deliberately perverted French justice. But in the manner of Hiss, an ersatz aristocrat known as Count Walsin-Esterhazy succeeded in muddying the waters with such brilliant deviousness that an innocent man was victimized.

Many French intellectuals were present at the public ceremony when Dreyfus was stripped of his rank. One of them, Maurice Barrès, typified established prejudice when he afterwards wrote of the victim: "Through some fatal power he possesses, or the force of the ideas associated with his name, the wretch evoked in all assembled a measure of antipathy. His foreign physiognomy, his impassive stiffness, the very atmosphere he exuded revolted even the most self-controlled of spectators."

By means of this impressionistic and superficial characterization, Barrès was expressing the deep-set fear of Germany that has haunted France ever since the Napoleonic wars. Rather than examine why Germany was superior in so many fields, particularly military and industrial, Frenchmen like Barrès retreated into superstition and conspiracy.

The Chambers case obliged American public opinion similarly to decide what view to hold of the power on the other side of the divide. Was the Soviet Union an ally or an enemy, the source of hope or the source of fear? In spite of the prejudice Chambers aroused and the innuendos and lies directed against him in court and in the press, the evidence of Soviet subversion and espionage was incontrovertible. Chambers gave legitimacy to anti-Communism, shifting public opinion as few individuals have ever done. Fellow travellers, the entire Left indeed, never forgave him for shattering their fantasies and self-perceptions.

Burnt out by the experience, Chambers puzzled the few friends and admirers that he had by abstaining from fighting the Cold War. Referring to the good of his soul, he refused with some vehemence to be the pawn of Nixon or Senator McCarthy. In *Witness* he was concerned to argue that a more religious age would have understood him readily. Although in general agreement, Tanenhaus does not greatly care for that book, finding it full of self-delusion and bolshevik in spirit. Still, he evokes very well the mood of melancholy that gathered in the hour of victory. Chambers had devised for himself a part of historic significance, only to regret it.

Even the Soviet leadership in the end conceded that no good had come from Communism and never could, writing off the whole experiment as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loss for mankind, beyond apology or remedy. The ideas associated with the names of Chambers and Hiss no longer have their old force. Chambers was vindicated, democracy emerged strengthened from the Cold War, and Hiss served his time in prison. It was a happy ending except in one respect, that Hiss tried to usurp the role of Dreyfus for himself. Protesting his innocence, calm and controlled as ever, he repeated and elaborated false accusations and lies until the day of his death, suppressing the truth with unyielding fanaticism. Nothing is known about how he saw himself or what Communism and the Soviet Union meant to him. It was not mere individual aberration. Facts were immaterial to him. The illusion that carried Communism and fellow-travelling to so absolute a length remains a phenomenon as mysterious as any.

DAVID PRYCE-JONES

Turning to History

DARK SONGS: SLAVE HOUSE AND SYNAGOGUE. By Laurence Lieberman. The University of Arkansas Press. $22.00
THE FUEHRER BUNKER: THE COMPLETE CYCLE. By W. D. Snodgrass. BOA Editions Limited. $15.00
WORK WITHOUT HOPE. By John Burt. The Johns Hopkins University Press. $16.95

One of the preoccupations of poets in this century has been to recuperate the energies of narrative, to reclaim from prose fiction that ancient tradition of storytelling which, up until the close of the last century, remained one of the chief glories of poetry. Although the personal lyric has become preeminent, the narrative impulse may only have been displaced; indeed, book-length poems and even verse novels seem now to be proliferating. But perhaps the most interesting development in this "return of the long poem" has been the turn towards the matter of history. Narrative may well prove to be the center of gravity for poetry after all and—despite postmodernism's supposed free play with the past—history itself possesses a *gravitas* too attractive to resist for long. Since the combination of narrative and history has so often been potent for poetry, it is no surprise to see its reemergence here in three recent books by American poets.

Dark Songs: Slave House and Synagogue is Laurence Lieberman's first full-length book of poetry since *New and Selected Poems: 1962-92*. The poems are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHICAGO REVIEW

~ Poets in Recent Issues ~

Mark Halliday
Mekeel McBride
Ralph J. Mills, Jr.
Christian Bök
Pam Rehm
Fanny Howe
Peter Gizzi
Elizabeth Alexander
Susan Hahn
Norma Cole
Anne Carson
Carl Rakosi
Phillip Foss
Barbara Guest
Ron Padgett
Pamela Lu
Alice Notley
August Kleinzahler
Nathaniel Mackey
Will Alexander
Benjamin Friedlander
Ronald Johnson
William Bronk
Paul Hoover
Michael Anania
Ray DiPalma
John Taggart
Lyn Hejinian
Medbh McGuckian
Robert Bly
Hilda Morley
Ted Pearson
Larry Price
Michael Palmer

Forthcoming:

43:3 ~ Peter Riley, Emmanuel Hocquard, Simon Cutts, Kathleen Fraser, Peter Russell

43:4 ~ Special Issue on Contemporary Poetry

One-year subscription for $18.
Save $6 off the cover price.

Foreign subscribers add $5 for postage. Institutional subscriptions are $35. Four issues per year. Make checks payable to:

CHICAGO REVIEW • 5801 S. Kenwood Ave. • Chicago IL 60637-1794
ph/fax (773) 702-0887 • chicago_review@uchicago.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

set in the present-day Caribbean but they draw on the violent and turbulent past which marks the history of these islands. The title poem, which opens the volume, takes us back to the time of the slave trade on the former Dutch colony of St. Eustatius, where the poet recounts a visit to the old slave quarters and, in doing so, recreates the scene of suffering. But this history is not drawn from books or written accounts but from human memory: from the stories passed down in families about what actually occurred. As he puts it:

> we children more inclined to trust
> tales we heard of slave days on Granddad's knee
> at bedtime than the remote sagas
> we find in our school books today.

It is characteristic of Lieberman to insist on this oral lineage because throughout the volume we see—we are made to see—how human testimony subverts received wisdom. The poem modulates into an account of Admiral Rodney's siege of Statia and his sudden forced removal of the entire Jewish population of the island. Thus the empty Slave House and the abandoned Synagogue stand as witnesses of how policies of hatred drain human life.

As the book progresses, nothing changes. We move to "Carib's Leap" in Grenada—where a tribe of Caribs jump from a cliff rather than face life under the rapacious Spanish—then on to poems detailing horrific accounts of the invasion of Grenada by the United States in 1983. In each instance the poet is present in the poem but is not the focus of concern. This is Lieberman's forte, to mediate history for us and yet resist the temptation to aggrandize the self by appropriating history's profound perspective. Almost all the poems have named people in them, for it is the voices of others that we hear most clearly and their experience that speaks most directly. Whether they involve a German tourist who brings a husband back to life; a political prisoner, whose heroism is matched only by his ordeals; a crazed militiaman who fought the Americans in Grenada; or a carefree "wharf angel" who charters his own boat, these poems all begin where the self leaves off. And yet in doing this, Lieberman sets up situations that, by their very structure, act like resonating chambers for the emotional depths he sounds in the poems. History is so often a mode of irony that it would be easy to strike the rueful note again and again, but Lieberman has a finer tact than that and keeps his poems from falling into either a self-regarding pathos or an easy rage. Thus, in "Cudjoe's Head," a village turns out to be named for the grisly execution of the youngest of a "slave family of runaways;" the poem ends with laconic and understated detail:

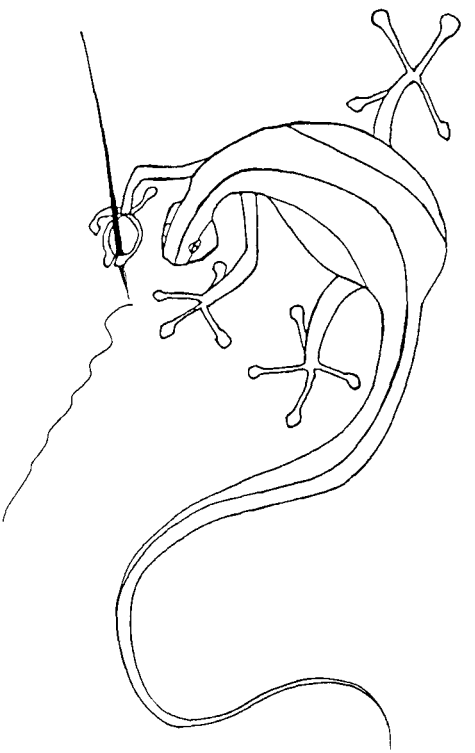
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SALAMANDER

a magazine for poetry, fiction & memoirs

Get to know Salamander, now celebrating its fifth anniversary year!

Some of our writers:
Mikhail Aizenberg
Indran Amirthanayagam
Sherwood Anderson
Eugenio de Andrade
Mikhail Bulgakov
Daniel Bosch
Jane Brox
Laure-Anne Bosselaar
Kurt Brown
Michael Collins
Peter Ho Davies
Sharon Dolin
Luciano Erba
George Franklin
Rita Gabis
Miguel Hernandez
Rika Lesser
Sabra Loomis
Irfan Malik
Suzanne Matson
Susan Monsky
Michael Pettit
Jacquelyn Pope
Ira Sadoff
Don Share
Laurie Sheck
Ann Snodgrass
Nguyen Quang Thieu
Goran Tomcic
Jean Valentine



To subscribe (2 years, 4 issues), send a check for $20 to:

Salamander
48 Ackers Avenue
Brookline, MA 02146
or call (617) 232-0031

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cudjoe
was beheaded on the spot with high public
ceremony, to discourage future breakouts: loose skull
oddly hurtled
down the canyon, as if chasing
his nimbler kinsfolk....

For all their apparent equanimity, Lieberman's poems are made edgy by history—there is a saving impatience here with history's unspeakable lessons, and this is reflected in the way his lines move out against the restrictions of verse, oscillating between the unforgiving margins that nonetheless give the poems their shape. Yet, in the end, what shapes these poems the most is a humane warmth and humor which serve to underwrite all the wonderfully imagined narratives.

In 1977 W. D. Snodgrass published his fourth book, *The Fuehrer Bunker: A Cycle of Poems in Progress*, which consisted of twenty poems about Hitler's last days. He added to these poems over the years, conceiving of them as a dramatic ensemble for staged performance, and now, almost twenty years later, he has finally completed the cycle. The book contains eighty-seven poems spoken by a cast drawn from the historical records. Most of the characters are all too familiar (Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler, Göring, Speer, and Eva Braun) but some are lesser known (Goebbels' wife Magda, Generals Heinrici and Weidling, and various functionaries). There is also a Chorus. The poems cover the period from April 1 to May 1, 1945, and, except for the Chorus poems, are all dated and introduced with a brief historical note. The poems are written in various forms, ranging from sprawling free verse to sestinas to grid-poems on graph paper, and they are printed in various typefaces as well.

All this would be surprising in a poet often regarded as the progenitor of the "confessional" poets were these poems not already familiar to us in part. Familiar too is the response that Snodgrass has followed up an obsession at the expense of his true talent for the personal or confessional lyric. But these are displaced lyrics, meant not only to probe the historic matrix of the Third Reich but also the connections these people have to us by virtue of their inhuman humanity. The poems tell a story, or rather dramatize a story, but the real drama is what happens to the reader confronted with this mirror. The achievement of Snodgrass is to insist that we recognize such people as people, so that we are struck not by the banality of evil so much as the blatancy of it. To restore Hitler and Himmler and the rest to humanity is to require us to own them—not that we sympathize (that remains repugnant), but that we see, that we respond by saying "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As it presents itself to the reader, the poem is more a masque than a drama, for the characters are never fully developed. And yet the voices begin to play off one another as the poem progresses, deepening the impression each character makes, until we come to know them by their own peculiar mode of delusion. The capacity, for instance, to lose sight of truth through an overwhelming belief is exemplified by Field Marshall Busch, who emerges from a meeting with Hitler in which he had intended to confront the Fürher with what was really happening:

> What could I have had in mind? To have
> Forgotten his successes—how he led us on
> Into the Saar, the Rhineland, into Austria,
> Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, while we
> Held back and said it was all impossible?
> Who saved us, standing firm that first winter
> When we would have retreated in a rout?
> Whose iron determination, and whose...
> And those eyes, the eyes!

Yet, when we have worked through this book, it is difficult for the acknowledged horror of base deception and self-deception, of cruelty and moral depravity, not to be rendered inert by the incommensurate horror of the historical context itself. The unspeakable is not necessarily unsayable, but perhaps the best response to the poem is its own epigraph: "Mother Teresa, asked when it was she started her work for abandoned children, replied, 'On the day I discovered I had a Hitler inside me.'"

Of the three poets considered here John Burt is the youngest, a member of a generation of poets now in their forties who are quietly emerging into prominence. Burt's first volume, *The Way Down*, was a polished and accomplished collection that already displayed a concern with narrative and history (including literary history). This new book, *Work Without Hope*, extends that impulse, recovering the past in order to uncover the present—though it is a present often enough with a dubious future. The poems range between lyric and narrative, sometimes combining into lyrical narratives that can be breathtaking in their beauty and poignancy. Thus, in "Love and Fame," we have John Keats meditatively watching over his mortally ill brother on the night Keats writes "When I Have Fears" (a sonnet which ends, "Till love and fame to nothingness do sink"):

> At the window he could count them: one,
> Then two, then three drops falling in the dark,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And to the dark, stars swept from the sky
Flashing downward silently all night.
Give me this hour, God, if nothing else.

In many of these poems, it is the "nothing else" that prevails, but in all of them there is an ebullient creativity at work which countermands the darker imperatives. At the center of this volume is a long narrative about an itinerant painter who does a portrait from a daguerreotype of a young woman recently deceased. It is a richly detailed and vivid piece. But perhaps the heart of the book is a series of historical narratives that present people whose failures of will or understanding have terrible consequences but whose behavior is too fully comprehended for condemnation. These include the captain of the Californian, who misunderstands the Titanic's SOS; a clerical friend of Erasmus who winds up involved in the slaughter of Anabaptists; or Neville Chamberlain justifying himself to himself in 1940. Most affecting, though, is Burt's recounting of a dirigible accident when workers, fearing for their lives, let loose the mooring ropes, thereby hoisting two co-workers into the air. The poet asks what we all ask, what would we have done in that situation?

Could I have kept those men somehow in line?
And if I had, might not that have killed us all?
I know those men woke nights, despised themselves,
Saw in their dreams those two come crashing down.
By now they, too, are dead; their moral flinch
Is past extenuation, and past blame.

There is a terrible sympathy at work in Burt's poetry, terrible because to understand and accept so much requires an openness to others' pain which cannot be separated from one's own. In a dark moment in 1825, Coleridge, at the end of the poem that gives Burt his book title, wrote, "Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve, / And Hope without an object cannot live." The object of Burt's poetry is a keener understanding of how we do go on working, without hope perhaps, but without despair too. To bring so much life to poetry is to bring poetry to life.

PAUL KANE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation 1. Title of Publication: Partisan Review. 2. Date of filing: October 1997. 3. Frequency of issue: Quarterly. 4. Location of known offices of publication: 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215, and One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023. 5. Location of the headquarters of general business office of the publisher: 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215, and One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023. 6. Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher; Partisan Review, Inc., 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215; William Phillips, Editor-in-Chief; Edith Kurzweil, Editor, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215. 7. Owner: Partisan Review, Inc. 8. Known bondholders, mortgages, and other securities; none. 9. For optional completion by publishers mailing at the regular rates (Section 131, 121. Postal Service Manual) 39 U. S. C. 3626 in pertinent part: "No person who would have been entitled to mail matter under former section 4359 of this title shall mail matter at rates provided under this subsection unless he files annually with the Postal Service a written request for permission to mail matter at such rates." In accordance with the provisions of this statute, I hereby request permission to mail the publication named in Item 1 at the reduced postal rates presently authorized by
39 U.S.C. 3626.
William Phillips, Editor-in Chief and Publisher

Average no. of copies	Actual no. of copies each issue during preceding 12 months	of single issue published nearest to filing date
II. Extent and nature of circulation:		
A. Total no. copies (Net Press Run)	7,800	8,000
B. Paid circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and earners, street vendors, and counter sales	3,600	3,755
2. Mail subscriptions	3,020	3,083
C. Total paid circulation	6,620	6,838
D. Free distribution by mail, samples, complimentary, and other free copies	200	200
E. Free distribution outside the mail	200	212
F. Total free distribution	400	412
G. Total distribution	7,020	7,250
H. Copies not distributed		
1. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	780	750
2. Returns from news agents	0	0
I. Total	7,800	8,000
Percent paid and/or requested circulation	94%	94%

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
William Phillips, Editor-In-Chief and Publisher

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The founders of 96 Inc are making the arts what they were in the beginning, intelligent playfulness for its own sake."

– Kurt Vonnegut

"An important magazine."

– Judy Bass, ***Boston Herald***

"I particularly like the clean uncluttered look of your magazine. Clearly 96 Inc is serving a very useful purpose."

– Markland Taylor, ***Variety***

Subscriptions are $13.00 per year. You will receive copies of the magazine and invitations to 96 Inc's readings and events.

96 INC

P.O. Box 15559
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 267-0543

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I Have Lots of Heart

Selected Poems

A Dual Text Spanish-English Edition

Miguel Hernández

Translated from the Spanish by Don Share

"He is a great master of language...a wonderful poet"—Pablo Neruda. Miguel Hernández is one of the most revered poets in the Spanish-speaking world. From his early writings to his final poems, passionate and bittersweet, his work is a dazzling reminder that force can never defeat spirit, and that courage is its own reward. Written in the midst of our savage century, the poems of Miguel Hernández beam with a gentleness of heart.

160 pages ISBN 1-85224-332-5 paper $18.95

Kerry Slides

Paul Muldoon

with photographs by Bill Doyle

Here Muldoon's words are rooted deep in the elemental beauty of Ireland's Dingle Peninsula. Accompanied by Bill Doyle's striking black and white photographs, *Kerry Slides* provides a unique and stirring poetic experience. **"Muldoon's among the most inventive poets in the English language...*Kerry Slides* is not only diverting, but accomplished and delightful—even profound"**—*The New Leader.* **"An inspired collaboration"**—*Booklist.*

62 pages ISBN 1-85235-190-X cloth $28.95

Today in the Café Trieste

Richard Tillinghast

This collection includes both new and old work from the University of Michigan professor. Tillinghast's writing stands out among contemporary poets for its focus on history, and for the ease with which it moves back and forth between widely different poetic idioms. **"[T]he strongest of the...poems...represent a fresh turn in Tillinghast's familiar voice and challenge his established competence by pushing him into new areas"**—*Harvard Review.*

88 pages ISBN 1-897648-84-7 paper $12.95

The Truth of Poetry

Tensions in Modernist Poetry Since Baudelaire

Michael Hamburger

One of the best introductions available to twentieth-century poetry and its antecedents. **"This is virtually an encyclopaedia of modern poetry; as such it has, I think, no rival"**—Frank Kermode. **"This book has great value"**—George Steiner.

360 pages ISBN 0-85646-275-6 paper $17.95

DUFOUR EDITIONS

PO BOX 7 • Chester Springs, PA 19425-0007

TEL 1-800-869-5677 • FAX 610-458-7103

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Austrian Cultural Institute, Boston University, and *Partisan Review*

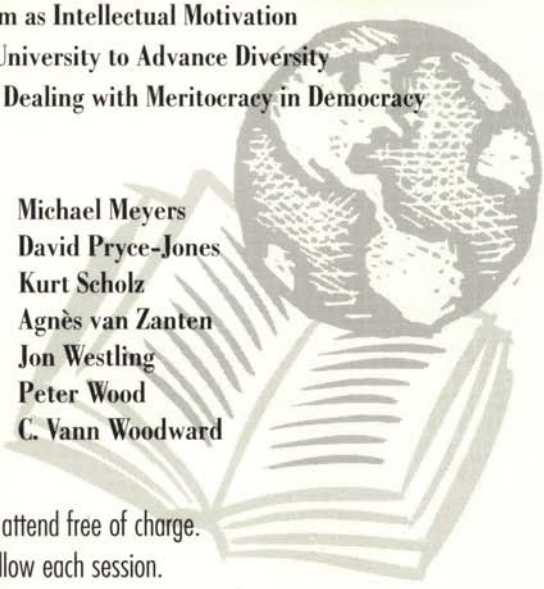
present a conference on

Education and Integration: Europe and America

Friday, May 8, and Saturday, May 9, 1998
George Sherman Union, Boston University, 775 Commonwealth Avenue

Join us in addressing

The Impact of High School Preparation on College Education
The Core Curriculum as Intellectual Motivation
Administering the University to Advance Diversity
Comparing Ways of Dealing with Meritocracy in Democracy



Participants include

Bernard Avishai
Robert Brustein
Chester Finn
Nathan Glazer
Rita Kramer
Edith Kurzweil
Jerry Martin
Michael Meyers
David Pryce-Jones
Kurt Scholz
Agnès van Zanten
Jon Westling
Peter Wood
C. Vann Woodward

The public is invited to attend free of charge.
Open discussion will follow each session.

For more information, call or write *Partisan Review*
236 Bay State Road, Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Tel: 617/353-4260 Fax: 617/353-7444

Partisan Review
Published at Boston University
Printed in the U.S.A.

LICENSED TO JSTOR
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED